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ABSTRACT

An overview of the salient issues in adult English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) literacy is presented as reported in the literature on adult education and applied linguistics. Emphasis is on programs that have implemented promising practices and effective approaches to help ESL students develop their literacy skills. Characteristics of effective adult ESL literacy programs are first outlined, and then several major themes are discussed, including: theoretical bases for different views of curriculum; varying approaches to literacy development in a second language; and assessment issues such as providing meaningful evidence of student progress both to funding sources and to students and teachers. The issue of teaching native language literacy to support the learning of English is also discussed, with emphasis on biliteracy and Spanish language literacy. Several promising practices are outlined, including using the language experience approach with ESL literacy students, and developing techniques for dealing with the multi-level classroom composed of literacy students with varied exposure to print. Lists of teacher resources are provided that include textbooks, ESL literacy guides and manuals, and other resources such as authentic materials. Contains approximately 300 references. (LB)
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ADULT ESL LITERACY: STATE OF THE ART 1990

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PREFACE

In this paper we present an overview of the salient issues in adult ESL literacy as they are reflected in the literature. We have focused on the major ideas expressed by educators who write books, curriculum guides, articles, and newsletters while at the same time keeping in mind the concerns of those who work in the field administering programs and teaching literacy students.

In the preparation of this paper, we have reviewed over 300 articles and books chosen from the more than 700 entries in the bibliographic database we have developed for the project. Since there are very few scholarly books and articles that discuss ESL literacy directly, we surveyed the fields of adult education and applied linguistics and focused on pertinent discussions of general adult literacy and biliteracy, as well as second language learning and ESL teaching. In reviewing the literature, we tried to keep in mind that our ultimate goal for the project will be to identify programs that have implemented promising practices and are effective in helping ESL students to develop their literacy skills.

A number of people contributed to this effort: Heide Spruck Wrigley wrote the sections on curriculum, theory and approaches, and assessment. Gloria J. A. Guth contributed the program effectiveness section and edited the entire manuscript. Kristin Helland provided the research and initial drafts for the sections on biliteracy and the Language Experience Approach, and Kathy Davis researched the multilevel classroom portion of the paper. Anabel Adler, with assistance from Kristin Helland, supported all sections of the manuscript by researching references, making editing changes, and formatting the entire document. Anlie Han, our assistant for the summer, input hundreds of entries into our computerized database.

INTRODUCTION

Adult ESL literacy programs have a particularly difficult mission since they strive to serve people who have limited proficiency in English and who have had varying degrees of exposure to print. Some speak a language like Hmong or Haitian Creole which has only recently come to have a written form. Others come from a literate society such as Mexico but either have never learned to read and write in their native language or have rudimentary literacy skills perhaps because their schooling stopped at the elementary level. Still others come from a literacy tradition that uses a non-Roman alphabet and may, as a result, have difficulty reading left to right or relating letters to sounds. Regardless of which group they fall into, adult ESL literacy students have difficulty with print and, owing to their limited experience with literacy, cannot make normal progress in a traditional ESL class (Shaw, 1984, p. 5 and ff.; Haverson & Haynes, 1982).

Many adult ESL literacy students differ from those served by traditional ESL programs in that "students who lack literacy in any language clearly have more difficulty in learning to read and write English than do students who are literate in their native tongue" (Dixon et al. [SRA Associates], 1987, p. 35). During the last twenty years, there has been increased awareness of the need for literacy programs to serve the limited English proficient population; yet as recently as 1985, a researcher (Longfield, 1985 [1984]) summed up the field by asserting that the

the entire area of teaching literacy skills to ESL students is barely in the formative stage. Teaching adults to read in a second language when they are illiterate in their native language requires special training and techniques. The training is seriously lacking, the techniques are in a developmental state, and the materials are almost nonexistent. (p. 11)

With the improvement of instruction and knowledge about ESL literacy practices and programs as our goal, in this paper we will outline what the literature says about some of the key issues that confront researchers and practitioners. Since adult ESL literacy is an emerging field, we will borrow extensively from findings in related fields such as educational linguistics, adult ESL, and adult literacy.

We will begin by outlining characteristics of effective adult ESL literacy programs that have emerged from our review of the research. Then we will proceed to amplify major themes such as the theoretical bases for different views of curriculum, varying approaches to literacy development in a second language, and assessment issues such as providing meaningful evidence of student progress both to funding sources and to students and teachers. Next we will take up the issue of teaching native language literacy to support the learning of English. Finally, we will outline several promising practices that are emerging from adult ESL literacy practitioners: using the language experience approach (LEA) with ESL literacy students and developing techniques for dealing with the multi-level classroom composed of literacy students with varied exposure to print. Finally, we will provide a list of teacher

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resources that have come to our attention including textbooks, ESL literacy guides and manuals, and other resources such as authentic materials.

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE ADULT ESL LITERACY PROGRAMS

The range of literacy backgrounds in an ESL literacy class can be very broad: some students may have been in the U.S. for some time and possess oral English skills that are far ahead of their written skills. Others may have lived in a native language community in the U.S. and never have acquired either reading or writing skills in English. Still others may be new to this country and unfamiliar with both the English language and American culture. Coping with such diverse backgrounds among students is not easy for either programs or teachers, and in this section we will outline some of the characteristics that effective adult ESL literacy programs exhibit.

Despite the difficulties inherent in teaching literacy to those without literacy in any language, no national studies of adult ESL literacy programs have been published although there are descriptions of individual or general programs often with a particular focus such as family literacy or amnesty preparation (Auerbach, 1990a; Anderson, 1988; Amnesty education, 1990; Young & Padilla, 1990). As a result, in outlining what is known about effective programs, we will mainly draw upon studies of effective adult literacy programs (which generally lack an ESL literacy component) and add to it from the general adult ESL literacy literature. Particularly useful in the former regard are Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide by Renee S. Lerche (1985), Guidelines for Effective Adult Literacy Programs prepared by Steven Mayer (1984), and Essential Characteristics of Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Review and Analysis of the Research by Miriam Balmuth (1986). Of additional use is "Strategies for Designing Literacy Programs for Single Mothers. Optimal Programming" written by Benita Somerfield for the Rockefeller Foundation (1989).

Lerche's overview is based on the findings of the National Adult Literacy Project (NALP), a federally-funded project that surveyed over two hundred adult literacy programs and visited thirty-eight of them. We will use the NALP conclusions and recommendations as the underpinning of our discussion of effective programs in this section, and we will fill in the ESL-literacy context from other literature as appropriate. Among the components of program operation that we will present in this overview of effective programs are: (1) recruitment, orientation, and counseling, (2) placement and assessment, (3) strategies for instruction including methods and materials, and (4) program management and staff development.

Recruitment, Orientation, and Counseling

The literature recommends that successful programs begin with a needs assessment of the community they will serve and then use that assessment to define clear objectives for the program. Community here refers to the area and culture from which the learners will come: prospective literacy providers may contact community leaders in Chinatown in San Francisco

or the tenants' association of a public housing project in Spanish Harlem in New York City.

Only after they understand the context in which their teaching will take place, do the effective programs begin to recruit students through personal contacts or referrals. It is important that the publicity and other recruiting efforts make realistic claims, so that prospective students are not later disappointed. Indeed, recruitment can be seen as a dialogue between the program and the community. The program first listens to what the community says it needs and then tells the community what it can offer (Balmuth, 1986; Lerche, 1985). Recruitment using current and past program participants seems to be particularly effective (Somerfield, 1989).

Mayer and others recommend that, in identifying the learner population, programs pay attention to language and cultural background, gender, age, prior education, ethnicity, skill levels, and employment needs (Mayer, 1984; Anderson, 1988; Berryman, 1989). Auerbach phrases a similar idea: "The only way to find out what a particular group is concerned about, how they already use literacy and how they might use it in addressing these concerns is to investigate the social context of their lives with them" (Auerbach, 1990a, p. 42).

Successful programs provide students with a friendly and positive introduction to program goals and the services that they offer. During orientation, programs should strive to offer psychological reassurance since some of the students may have had bad experiences with schooling. Anderson (1988) links this point to analyzing the individual learner's situation:

Adult ESL/literacy learners have no time to waste; they may be giving formal learning its last chance. The learning facilitator, therefore, must be adept at working with the learner to quickly identify the key learning tasks. Using real life experience immediately establishes the relevancy of the knowledge and the practicality of the skills to be learned. (p. 18)

The NALP study (Lerche, 1985) reports that successful programs will

Demonstrate to prospective students how you have built the program's services on a clear understanding of the education, employment opportunities, and quality of life of the individuals living in the community. (p. 66)

The initial recruitment and orientation is, of course, just one aspect of a program's contact with the community. Indeed, program staff should be alert to the changing needs of the community from which their learners come.

Counseling services in a number of different guises constitute another component of effective programs. Ideally, the counseling should pertain both to literacy issues per se and to coping with other needs that interfere with language learning. Networking with social service agencies can ensure that some of the learners' basic economic needs are addressed, and providing referrals to other literacy programs can ensure that potential learners are not

frustrated by a program inappropriate for their needs. Providing support services such as child care, transportation, and referrals to job placement agencies can be important factors in helping adult students stay in class (Balmuth, 1986; Somerfield, 1989).

Placement and Assessment

In the areas of placement and assessment, adult ESL literacy programs whose learners may know little or no English can encounter some difficulties. It is essential that the program ascertain what literacy skills the student already possesses and provide a mechanism for student goal-setting. To do this for learners who are not English-speakers requires using a bilingual teacher or counselor for intake since a questionnaire in English will not produce useful information. Volunteer native language tutors can sometime fill this role if teachers are not able to. Although questions related to goals may seem too vague for some students, finding out what they need to read (applications, addresses, bus destinations, signs) and what they need to write (applications, letters, school permission slips, checks) can be a first step. If lessons are directed towards these needs, the program ensures not only that the lesson will be practiced in real life but also that the student gains some measure of success by applying new skills to everyday life (Shaw, 1984).

Methods of placement and assessment remain controversial, even in traditional literacy programs. For example, Lerche (1985) reports that NALP found that:

Despite this universal use of tests for both diagnosis and assessment, program directors and teachers alike expressed ambivalence about the virtues of many of the test they currently administer. Tests that yield reading grade level scores may or may not be viewed as helpful in selecting materials written at an appropriate level of difficulty, but no instructors believe that such results can tell them anything about what specific skills they should include in a student's instructional program. Instructors seem to have an intuitive sense that some tests, especially standardized achievement tests, do not really measure the instructional goals they set with students. (p. 84)

These areas of placement and assessment pose even greater challenges for adult ESL literacy programs. In the first place, adult ESL literacy students have varying degrees of familiarity with written language. In a single classroom, a teacher may have learners who range from being able to read and write simple sentences in their native language to those whose native culture has no literacy tradition. Although effective programs do not have one method of placement and/or assessment in common, all successful programs have worked out some form of placement. Moreover, effective programs develop a plan for ongoing and systematic assessment, both for feedback to students and for the program's own evaluation. What the NALP study (Lerche, 1985) found to be true for literacy programs in general pertains also to the assessment needs of adult ESL literacy programs:

No single commercial test or teacher-generated technique could be designed to yield the variety of data that might be needed. Programs would do better to use a mix of tests and informal assessment procedures and select what goes into that mix based on the specific goals of the students and the program. A test may be termed valid because it measures what the test sets out to measure, but the kind of validity a program must seek is in terms of what the program sets out to measure. (p. 97, emphasis in the original)

A recent national forum on literacy advocated that "qualitative measures of program effectiveness and learner progress should be used in combination with quantitative measures" (Literacy Network, 1989; cf. Diekhoff, 1988). Exactly what these qualitative measures should be or how funders can be convinced to accept them remains as an issue. However, whether the topic is individual assessment of learners' progress or evaluation of the program as a whole, judgments must be related to the goals of the students and, through them, the goals of the program.

Therefore, assessment tests and procedures must be clearly tied to the goals of the program and the curriculum it has adopted. Moreover, they should be designed to serve adult students, not just report to funding agencies. Effective programs provide their students with regular assessment. Non-traditional forms of assessment such as the portfolio method are favored by many effective adult ESL literacy programs. The NALP study suggests that, based on the literacy programs they surveyed, effective programs must be able "to measure the effect of instruction in functional ways. With respect to the latter, programs should be able to assess what learners can do differently as a result of their participation in the program" (Lerche, 1985, p. 188).

Strategies for Instruction

In their study of literacy programs in California, Solorzano and his colleagues stress that instructional methods for language minority adults should take into account learners' backgrounds because comprehension is improved when the material can be related to the students' backgrounds (Solorzano et al., 1989). Adults come to an ESL literacy class "with a great amount of stored knowledge and experience that can both help and hinder them" (Longfield, 1985 [1984]). Although they have the desire to become more literate in common, ESL literacy learners are a heterogeneous group composed of adults with varying levels of primary language literacy, various native languages, and various levels of English oral skills (Solorzano et al., 1989, p. 22). The latter is often a function of whether the student is a newcomer or has lived in the U.S. for some time. An effective program will distinguish between these two groups of non-literate adult learners since their needs are different and will dictate the use of different programs, methods, and instructional materials (Midwest, 1987, p.2).

Because of a wide range of background among students, a wide range of learning activities must be employed. "Adults are more likely to learn if there is active participation, immediate feedback, and if connections can be established between new concepts and relevant prior knowledge and experience" (Longfield, 1985 [1984]). The watchwords of successful adult ESL literacy programs seem to be to use what the students already know to build literacy skills that they don't yet have.

Lerche and her colleagues found that successful literacy programs "structure and systematize their instructional design. They closely link instructional objectives to materials and methods and to assessment of student progress" (Lerche, 1985, p. 101). Although there is little controversy about linking instructional goals to the choice of materials, approaches, and student assessment, there is some debate about the type of structure desirable. Some who work more directly in the field of adult ESL literacy favor involving both teachers and students in a participatory generation of the curriculum. For example, Anderson points out that learners may not be able to articulate what they need or want to learn because of low levels of self-confidence, because they have been "marginalized in society," or because they have preconceived ideas about appropriate teacher and student roles (Anderson, 1988, pp. 18-19). Auerbach stresses that instead of "trying to cover content that has been predetermined, teachers need to discover content that's important to their own students" (Auerbach, 1990a). Although there will be difficulties in establishing the design and implementation of a program based on learner needs, an effective program will be repaid for its efforts by learners who progress and retention rates that reflect that fact.

For learners who are not native English speakers, the need may be for less structure in instruction and for more flexibility in approach, technique, and materials in order to find out what works with particular groups of students. Most adult educators feel that to be successful with ESL literacy learners, a program must begin with listening and speaking and then move on to reading and writing. The issue here is how much of a basis in oral language the students should have before proceeding to reading and writing (Shaw, 1984; Savage, 1985 [1984]).

One recent writer has posited that the whole language approach is most appropriate for non-literate learners because "approaches that focus on meaning rather than on structure make learning more accessible to students who don't have a history of schooling." An example of the flexibility that effective programs display is the creation of modules that allow for a variety of instructional modes -- whole group, small group, and individual instruction. The whole group activities, mainly oral and perhaps involving role playing, reinforces the idea that each student has something to contribute. The students then summarize the activity by dictating a story (Rabideau, 1989b, citing John Een, p. 10).

Materials pose a particular problem since most ESL materials for adults assume that the learner is literate, and there are few materials for teaching literacy to the non-literate language-minority adult. For the non-literate, traditional ESL texts have often been only one more obstacle in the path to learning English (Savage, 1985 [1984], p. 28). As an

example of what good programs can do, Mayer advocates an "experiential" focus, using the learner's own experiences with grocery stores, family, schools, and work to create learning opportunities (Mayer, 1984, p. 4-1). Anderson (1988) takes this a step further and describes how a program can develop relevant materials by going out and taking photographs, using cartoons and illustrations from learners' surroundings, and, for more advanced students, utilizing participant-written interviews and stories.

In general, the key for developing curriculum and an overall design for instruction is to make it learner-focused, i.e., to choose instructional strategies and materials to help learners reach their own goals. Effective programs often view developing curriculum as cooperative venture among program leaders, teachers, students, and the community. With non-literate learners, it may be especially important for the program to provide a context-rich curriculum. One program person commented "Non-literate students are used to relying on context to make meaning of what surrounds them; this is a skill that can be made use of in instruction" (Rabideau, 1989b, citing John Een, p. 10).

To summarize from the NALP study (Lerche, 1985, pp. 154-155), in designing instruction for adults, educators in a successful adult ESL program should consider the following:

- (1) Recognize that the student population is made up of adults.
- (2) Supply opportunities to apply skills in adult functional contexts.
- (3) Involve students in making decisions about their educational program.
- (4) Anticipate the multiplicity of learning goals and learning styles with a variety of educational program options.
- (5) Build a true instructional management system based on clearly stated behavioral principles.
- (6) Build a system of documenting student progress and achievement.

Taken together, these marks of a successful instructional plan recognize that the learners are adults with adult responsibilities who will more easily acquire literacy skills if they participate in the process of setting their educational goals. The responsibility of the program is to analyze their students' needs and make available a variety of learning strategies and materials. Of course, the program must also provide some measures that illustrate student literacy progress both for the student and for funding agencies.

Program Management and Staff Development

Successful programs develop well-articulated program goals that strive to meet learner goals. For example, if a program has the goal of fostering the development of pre-reading skills for non-literate language-minority adults, it will provide the means for them to perceive the link between oral and written language and encourage them to progress to recognizing words and their meaning and constituent letters and sounds. (In what order these skills are acquired is still subject to debate.) It will motivate them to move to increasingly higher

levels of comprehension and teach them how to write in English, beginning with how to hold a pencil and to be able to copy, then moving on to completing forms and writing simple letters that are legible and intelligible (Longfield, 1985 [1984], p. 9). Again, the route to take to achieve these goals varies from program to program.

Literacy program leaders interviewed for the NALP study were "divided on how to document goals and outcomes, and indeed, on which goals and outcomes to document," and the same is true for directors of adult ESL literacy programs (Lerche, 1985). Moreover, the NALP researchers found that assessment was a particularly difficult issue since

achievement of program goals, the effectiveness of such program components as counseling, and the effectiveness of the teaching staff can be difficult to monitor and document. As many staff members reported, goals are easier to measure when they are closely tied to quantifiable data. However, programs do want to evaluate the achievement of such broad goals as positive impact on the community as well as the more personal and affective goals of the students. (pp. 171-172)

An effective program will provide in-service for teachers even if they only teach part-time or are volunteers. It will provide them with an arsenal of methods and teach them which are appropriate for various learner goals and backgrounds. Staff development activities such as these have a "powerful relationship to effective programs" (Balmuth, 1986, p. 30). Successful programs tend to involve both staff and learners in any and all decisions that affect them.

Summary

Based upon the research studies and program descriptions that we have examined to date, our preliminary view is that effective adult ESL literacy programs are learner-centered and they do many of the following:

- (1) know their students' backgrounds and literacy needs. They have developed ways of involving the students in setting goals for the program that match the students' goals for themselves. They employ a learner-centered approach.
- (2) employ a variety of strategies which emphasize the connection between what the students already know and their new literacy skills.
- (3) use classroom techniques that are appropriate for adult learners and reinforce their sense of efficacy and self-worth. Pairing advanced students with beginners and mixing cooperative learning with whole-group activities illustrate the flexibility that is the hallmark of good programs.

- (4) use materials that spring from the real-life situations of the students. In other words, the materials are learner-focused.
- (5) display some flexibility in location and scheduling to accommodate the adult needs and responsibilities of their students.
- (6) support their teachers and volunteers through regular inservice (particularly for curriculum design and new methods and techniques) and maintain morale through regularly soliciting feedback and acting upon it. Effective programs should show some evidence of successful recruitment and retention of both learners and teachers.
- (7) plan and provide some measure of assessment that will indicate to both program and student that goals have been attained or progress has been made.
- (8) often utilize innovative processes that evolve through a trial and error strategy.

One of the major keys to a successful adult ESL literacy program is to reflect consistently the program philosophy in all phases of the program from instructional methods to staff development to student assessment. Indeed, the choice of a philosophy informs all the other decisions that a program must make. By choosing to make a program learner-centered and focused on the experiences and knowledge of the adult learners, regardless of whether that means, for example, defining competencies anew with each group of learners or having learners participate more actively in developing the curriculum, teachers can make the adult ESL literacy classes relevant to the daily lives of the students:

By using a theme of local and personal interest, the structural elements of language learning (grammar, punctuation, spelling) become vehicles to express and expand upon that experience and knowledge. (Anderson, 1988, p. 23)

If a program does its job well (teaches literacy) and is consistent in its approach and able to articulate its viewpoint both to funders and to learners, it will be effective. What has been said about adult literacy programs generally is also true for adult ESL literacy programs: "The best programs are responsive to the adults they serve and are therefore often somewhat idiosyncratic in their curricula and ambiance" (Somerfield, 1989).

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2. THE ESL LITERACY CURRICULUM: ISSUES AND OPTIONS

The language and literacy curriculum has long been characterized by the juxtaposition of the individual and society, the personal and political, tradition and innovation, theory and practice. These tensions are reflected in the various theories about the purpose and the role of literacy. Yet, while every curriculum must take into account (explicitly or implicitly) the social nature of literacy, each may differ in the way literacy is conceptualized and taught.

The common sense definition of curriculum is "a course of study", a designation that implies that curriculum is static, relatively neutral, and value-free, the result of purely technical decisions. However, this definition ignores the social, political, and economic contexts that influence not only the goals and content of the literacy program, but also who is to benefit from what kind of knowledge, under what circumstances, and to what end. Discussions of the literacy curriculum now also frequently center around issues related to gender, race, and social status (Auerbach, 1989; Shor, 1987; Giroux, 1983; Wallerstein, 1983), with women's issues being given special consideration (Figuerola et al., c.1989; Young & Padilla, 1990; Hofman, 1983; Isserlis, 1990; Keller, 1990; Spero, 1985; Zinn, 1980). Increasingly, literacy educators have come to view the curriculum not as a static product, but as a dynamic process in which goals, assessment, contents, materials, classroom practice, and teacher education are interrelated and continuously defined (Doll, 1986; Eisner, 1982; Schubert, 1986).

Six Basic Orientations to the Literacy Curriculum

The literacy curriculum can be seen as a reflection of six basic pedagogical orientations, perspectives, or paradigms, each reflecting not only a certain view of literacy, but of society as well, and the role that teachers and learners play within that society. Each of these orientations has a definite focus, giving rise to a literacy curriculum that teaches towards either (1) the development of cognitive processes, (2) academic excellence, (3) personal relevance, (4) social adaptation, (5) social reconstruction, or (6) technological management of education (see Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Giroux, 1981; Miller, 1983; Schubert, 1986).

1. Development of Cognitive Processes

This orientation focuses on the development of cognitive and linguistic processes, emphasizing "learning how to learn" as its goal. It stresses process over content, strategies over skills, and understanding over memorization. In encouraging adults to make their own meaning by interacting with each other as well as with the text, it recognizes both the social context and the social construction of knowledge. Originally influenced by the early work of John Dewey and the scientific approach of developmentalists like Piaget, this perspective now relies on the works of cognitive psychologists and psycholinguists, such as de

Beaugrande, Neisser, Rumelhart, and Smith. In ESL literacy, the cognitive processing orientation is reflected in the "interactive reading" approach, reading for academic purposes (Dubin et al., 1986), and various forms of the whole language curriculum. A curriculum based on this perspective would choose a literacy approach that focuses on reading and writing strategies such as predicting meaning from context (e.g., through the use of environmental print), confirming predictions, using one's knowledge of the world, and learning to identify word pattern and recognize letters. (For a full discussion on schema-theoretic approaches and interactive reading, see the section below on learning to read and write.) Literacy programs that rely heavily on inquiry and on problem-solving in the classroom also fall into this category.

Some educational writers critique this orientation as part of an interactionist ideology that sees meaning as primarily psychological and person-centered (Giroux, 1981). They charge that the content presented and the experiences provided through this approach ignore the conflicts of the wider society and thus divorce learning from social action. Giroux further suggests that this orientation has shown little concern for the class, race, and gender-related history of different groups of students. In his view, the emphasis on individual "meaning-making" ignores the fact that the language practices used in school carry both political and cultural significance.

2. Academic Excellence

The academic excellence perspective is based in large part on "academic rationalism" (Eisner & Vallance, 1974), one of the oldest and most basic orientations to curriculum. It is grounded in the tradition of 18th century liberal education (the best for the best), a view still held by modern day writers on education such as Bloom and Hirsch (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1988; Kliebard, 1979). In its non-elitist form, it is perceived as providing for all students a common core of educational experiences, including the development of standard literacy skills. The knowledge and skills thus transmitted constitute the shared intellectual base presumed necessary for advancement through the academic ranks and entry into the mainstream. Such an approach is also believed to avoid the dangers of individualization which may result in tracking in school and increased social stratification for language minority adults (Bloom, 1987).

ESL literacy curricula that follow this orientation tend to take a "basic skills" approach and teach towards the established standards in reading and writing that should be acquired by all (e.g., a sound basis in phonics, proper spelling and punctuation, and correct interpretation of a reading passage). Reading sections in basic skills texts tend to shy away from controversial subjects, focusing instead on discussions of traditional American values and symbols.

Advocates of an academic excellence perspective point out that immigrant and minority students must be taught the values of the mainstream society, the language skills needed to

succeed academically and professionally and should be made aware of the standards by which their literacy efforts will be measured at various gatekeeping points (e.g., at the GED test or for entry into JTPA programs). To do less might preclude these students from access to better jobs and higher education.

Academic rationalism, the basis for much of the academic excellence orientation, is sometimes accused of "crippling ethnocentrism" and contempt for the language, literacies, and social interactions of those "outside the circle of power". Critics charge that this perspective tends to promote a deficit model of literacy in which language minority adults and their families are seen as dysfunctional, culturally inferior, educationally deprived, and linguistically impoverished (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1988; Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Delpit, 1988).

3. Personal Relevance

The personal relevance orientation emphasizes the primacy of personal meaning and views it as the school's responsibility to develop literacy programs that make such meaning possible. Its major focus is on the educational development of the individual and the psychological freedom that results from experiencing a personally relevant curriculum within a non-coercive environment. Literacy approaches within that model emphasize the affective dimensions of the reading and writing process and see personal growth and self-actualization through literacy as one of their main goals. A curriculum that focuses largely on personal accounts and autobiographies (e.g., Language Experience) also represents this orientation.

For some critics, the Personal Relevance and the Cognitive Processes orientations share the common view that knowledge is a subjective construct arrived at through interactions among speakers or between a reader and a text. (Giroux, 1981; Taylor, 1983 cited in Auerbach, 1990a). These critics maintain that neither orientation explicitly addresses the broader economic and political issues related to the social distribution of knowledge and thus fail to link personal experience to a larger socio-cultural context. Other educators point out that defining literacy solely in terms of helping students to achieve their personal goals for literacy, does not "address the public's need to measure literacy attainment in quantifiable form" (Lytle et al., 1986). As some literacy educators point out: "A student might count a gain in feelings of self-worth as more important than a gain in reading and writing skills, *per se*, but such growth is not possible to capture in numbers, nor is it asked for by public funding agencies (Lytle et al., 1986, citing Fingeret 1984, p.26). Diekhoff also finds changes in personal life style suspect as a measurement of literacy progress (Diekhoff, 1988).

4. Social Adaptation

The social adaptation orientation sees the functions of school as fulfilling the critical language and literacy needs of the learners, the community, and the society at large. It is designed to help adults acquire the skills and knowledge needed to be self-sufficient, to function effectively in society, to access services, and to integrate into the mainstream culture.

Social adaptation is rooted in the social efficiency education movement of the early 1900s which designed a curriculum that would contribute to a smoothly running, efficient society by preparing students for the adult roles they were to occupy later in life. It focuses on "scientific" curriculum-making, diagnostic assessment, achievement testing, and a course of study based on needs assessment. In many ESL literacy programs that follow this orientation, the skills and knowledge needed for successful participation in the society are outlined in the form of competencies and tested through standardized assessments.

As part of social adaptation, the functional ESL literacy curriculum differs from the academic basic skills orientation inasmuch as it focuses on what learners should be able to do with print rather than what they know about reading and writing (see also Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982). It is meant to provide instruction that is both cost effective and time efficient, since the goals are clearly articulated in the form of objectives, needs assessment is based on the literacy tasks that students should master, classroom learning is performance-based, and testing of achievement levels is clearly aligned with the core curriculum (Alamprese et al., [1987]; Mainstream English Language Teaching (Melt), 1985).

To some critics, functional literacy is dominated by mechanical approaches to reading and writing in which the notions of critical thinking and the interrelationship between culture and power may disappear under the imperatives of the economy and the demands of the labor process (Sarmiento, 1989; Ilsley, 1989; Collins et al., 1989). In discussing literacy for employment, a number of educators point out that workers often do not need the workplace competencies outlined in a conventional workplace literacy program since they either already have the requisite skills (otherwise they would not have been able to obtain those jobs or would have been fired some time ago) or the jobs require very little literacy, and there is no career ladder to which they can aspire (Jurmo, 1990; Collins et al., 1989).

Weinstein-Shr discusses how the functional curriculum, although it may be conceptually sound, often misses the mark if developed by sources not familiar with students' actual lives. To make her point, she relates her own experiences with a competency-based survival curriculum: "(I) dutifully taught a class of older Hmong women to read supermarket labels, only to discover that the women bought their meat wholesale from a butcher and grew their own vegetables. After having them practice filling out forms, observations in family settings made it clear that the older children who had a facility with literacy did the family form-filling" (Weinstein-Shr, 1989b, p. 15). She further points out that our concept of classic survival English (or life skills) is only one reason why elders come to class since many of

them, especially elder Latinos (and Latinas), have all their survival needs met in the Spanish-speaking community (p.15).

5. The Social Reconstruction Orientation

Issues of culture and power lie at the heart of the social reconstruction orientation. Radical theorists like Apple (1979) and Giroux (1983) see the schools not only as cultural agencies but as political sites as well. This perspective seeks an examination of the hidden curriculum of ESL and literacy programs and challenges educators to examine a school system in which certain forms of literacy and language are legitimated while others are devalued (Auerbach, 1986; Tollefson, 1989).

The reconstructionist perspective has given rise to many of the liberationist or Freirean-inspired literacy curricula. Many Freirean based programs maintain that traditional literacy approaches ignore the culture, language, and social issues that both inform and dignify the everyday life of the poor. In this view, traditional teaching is not only repressive and alienating, but it also reinforces the dominant view of language minority adults as inferior and responsible for their location in the class structure. Freire proposes an approach that recognizes the "cultural capital" of the oppressed in order to dignify their voices, experiences, and modes of interaction and encourages learners to produce class "texts" that reflect the social and political issues important to their lives (Auerbach, 1989; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1987; Spener, 1990; Wallerstein, 1983).

The social reconstructionist orientation is sometimes critiqued by mainstream scholars as a paternalistic approach that works under the assumption that all language minority students feel oppressed and want to work towards changing the society. Using their own experience as a basis, many teachers maintain that their students want to develop the language, knowledge, and skills that will help them to move beyond the gatekeeping points that society has set up to that they can gain access to the mainstream society. The participatory, dialogue model common to Freirean pedagogy has also been critiqued as one in which the teacher, by becoming a co-learner, abdicates the role of the expert that students come to expect. As Delpit (1988) points out (in the context of using a process model of teaching literacy), this approach may appear to students "that there are secrets being kept, that time is being wasted, that the teacher is abdicating his or her duty to teach" (p. 85; cf. Auerbach, 1990a).

6. Curriculum as Technology

The technology curriculum derives its education management approach from the social efficiency movement. It claims to be value free and emphasizes its utility in any educational undertaking, be it literacy for academic preparation, for daily life, or for the workplace. Many of the curriculum technologists have built their materials on the means-end approach

championed by Tyler (1946), stressing pre-determined objectives, purposeful activities, scope and sequence, and standardized evaluation instruments based on "scientific" data. The technology orientation employs models and concepts borrowed from industry, using terms such as diagnostic testing, literacy audits, behavioral objectives, training modules, teacher training, and learning outcomes. Literacy curricula based on this orientation often include computerized program management components that assess students, move them through an instructional sequence, and track their progress. For example, in some technology-based courses, the computer program generates information about each lesson that the student has attempted and reports on several aspects of student achievement and effort (or lack thereof). Students who move too fast through a set and, in the process, get all the answers wrong may get reported as "not trying hard enough"; similarly, if students take too much time between answers (talking to their friends or daydreaming, perhaps), the computer will report that insufficient time was spent "on task". [Examples are taken from the computer program entitled Basic Adult Skills Education (BASE)].

Within the technology orientation, objectives once established are rarely questioned, creating "a determinacy about them which is incompatible with the indeterminacy of everyday life situations" (Collins, 1983). Technology-based curricula are increasingly marketed to industry and used in workplace literacy training. Although this orientation uses an industrial metaphor (education as business), it may nevertheless fall short of preparing students for a world of technology and information processing, in which flexibility, adaptability, and ways of dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty appear increasingly important for job retention and promotion (Chisman, 1989; Chisman & Associates, 1990; Packer, 1990; Terdy, 1990; Wiley & Wrigley, 1987; Wrigley & Brady, 1989).

The technology perspective is often linked to "individualized instruction" in which students are pretested, given assignments to complete, and then assessed to determine whether they have mastered the required concepts. This approach also has its critics. Auerbach, for example, argues that individualization may run counter to the preferred cultural learning mode of many immigrant students and may deprive the learners of opportunities to draw on the strength of their collectivity with other students (Auerbach, 1986; Collins, 1983). Others object to what they see as the ahistorical, apolitical, unethical, and atheoretical stance of curriculum making in the "scientific" mode, and a number of critics see behavioral objectives and standardized assessment procedures as a form of social control that makes it easy to manipulate teachers and students alike (Giroux, 1981; Tumplosky, 1984).

Some teacher educators have voiced additional concerns about the technology perspective. Many find that at a time when teachers involved in the education of language minority students are concerned with the lack of status and professionalism in ESL, a technologically designed curriculum, pre-packaged for education management, will only further contribute to what has been called the "deskilling" of teachers. They feel that curriculum orientations that stifle the creativity and enthusiasm of teachers will in turn stifle the creativity of students, making literacy education an experience to be endured rather than appreciated and enjoyed (Smith, 1986).

The Ethics of Curriculum Making

Many if not most of the curricula designed for ESL literacy programs reflect to varying degrees one or more of the six perspectives. Since each orientation posits a fundamentally different view about the nature of literacy, the link between education and society, and the role of teachers and learners, the curriculum decisions a program makes are in fact ethical decisions, the claims of the supposedly value-neutral technology orientation notwithstanding. Selecting an appropriate curriculum, developing one's own, or choosing a synthesis between different perspectives thus merits an examination of the theories, values, and assumptions that underlie curriculum inquiry and curriculum making.

The Case for a Continuum

While a number of ESL literacy programs fall squarely into one orientation or another (e.g., many ABE funded programs clearly teach towards social adaptation, while some community-based programs see social reconstruction as their goal), others are not so easily categorized. For example, not all liberating education programs focus primarily on consciousness raising and political emancipation, nor does a competency-based program necessarily preclude the discussion of socio-political issues such as immigration, sex discrimination, or community activism. Indeed, as some programs move towards a synthesis, concepts such as "community needs assessment", "empowerment", "participatory curriculum", and "learner-centered" approaches are losing their initial impact since most program models now claim to support these goals in one way or another.

While some programs are becoming more effective by moving from an overly eclectic, ad-hoc approach towards a well articulated model, others may be innovative precisely because they resist categorization. Instead of trying to adhere to only one paradigm and forsaking all others, a number of programs are developing their own orientation, hoping to find a conceptual framework that allows them to deal effectively with the tensions that characterize literacy education for adults. Such programs may end up implementing a curriculum that shows their students how to make the system work for them while, at the same time, teaching them to stand up for their rights. They may already have developed ways of integrating basic literacy skills with cognitive strategies for dealing with print, or they may have found various means of linking their students' personal accounts with the larger social, cultural, and political issues of the community.

Thus the field may be ready to move away from the dichotomous thinking in which ESL literacy is viewed in terms of good or bad, black or white, mainstream or alternative (see Alan Maley (1989) "I Got Religion;"). The time may have come to view ESL literacy programs along the lines of an innovation continuum. Under this model, an ESL literacy curricula would be viewed as "as more or less" in touch with a particular orientation, so that an individual curriculum could be (1) more or less based on current reading and writing theory (after all, theories change); (2) more or less focused on functional literacy or on

personal relevance; (3) more or less geared towards social adaptation or political change; and (4) more or less participatory and learner-centered.

A continuum approach could also encourage discussions of how seemingly contradictory needs can be addressed, including (1) the demand by administrators and instructors for a ready-made curriculum versus the right of students to materials that address their individual needs and goals; (2) the push from theorists to implement modern methods versus the tendency of teachers to stay with "what works"; (3) the demand from funding sources for public accountability and the desire of teachers for program-based assessments; (4) the needs of a changing economy and the rights of workers; (5) the knowledge, skills, and strategies required for access to mainstream services and institutions versus the right of all learners to have their experience, culture, and language represented and valued in the classroom.

Conclusion

As more and more ESL literacy programs are explicitly acknowledging the social nature of literacy, they are seeking a literacy orientation that allows them to integrate the various student goals and teacher interests with the social, academic, and/or economic focus the program has chosen to support through literacy. Within that framework, some innovative programs are now looking at curriculum as a process that helps them develop a common perspective from which to discuss issues related to assessment, classroom teaching, literacy approaches and teacher education. In the future, the innovative ESL literacy curriculum may no longer be simply a product, it may become a tool for moving towards program innovation and effectiveness.

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3. LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: THEORIES, APPROACHES AND INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES

As a reading teacher I was in a somewhat similar position to those primitive societies that perform ritual ceremonies to make the rain come. They know that pouring water on the ground won't really open the heavens, but they have to do something.

Michael Simons cited in Cambourne, 1979

Learning to read and write is not a simple process, especially for adults who are acquiring literacy in a second language and have no or little previous experience with print. It involves being able to understand what a text means, matching marks on the page with the meaning of words, connecting the message of a text with background knowledge and experience, and interpreting the overall purpose of a text (Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Byrnes, 1987; Cambourne, 1979; Carrell, 1987; Eskey, 1988; Goodman et al., 1984; Hughes, 1986; Kern, 1989; Smith, 1982a; Smith, 1988). Obviously then, there can be no quick and easy way to acquire the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed for understanding and using written language and becoming what society considers a literate person. There are, however, a number of approaches to teaching literacy that show promise in helping students become independent readers and writers.

Conceptualizing the Reading and Writing process

The different approaches available to literacy educators reflect different ways of conceptualizing the reading and writing process. Bottom-up approaches, sometimes referred to as outside-in or synthetic approaches (Cambourne, 1979; Hughes, 1986; Savage, 1984), are often lumped together under the heading of "phonics". They reflect literacy as a process that is largely visual and technical, requiring that the new reader learn to associate letters with sounds before moving on to meaningful texts. The "bottom" here refers to the marks on the page, the letters that need to be blended. In this view, the meaning of a word resides on the page, "outside" of the readers mind. This theory holds that before a word can be understood as a unit, smaller parts such as letters and syllables need to be assembled and sounded out, a process often referred to as "decoding" (Balmuth, [1986]; Chall et al., 1987; Solorzano et al., 1989).

In contrast, top-down orientations, also called "analytic" or "inside-out" approaches, see reading and writing as a cognitive process through which the reader associates meaning with print. The "top" here refers to global ideas that exist "inside" the brain. As readers study the print on a page, they simultaneously try to match their own background knowledge with the ideas that appear in front of them, in the process "making meaning." For example, a person who is familiar with the culture of shopping in a U.S. supermarket will be able to

match that background knowledge against the words found on the store directory, the grocery shelves, and product labels and thus can easily complete the task of finding a particular item. On the other hand, someone who has only shopped at a farmer's market may find the experience confusing, overwhelming, and frustrating in spite of having good literacy skills. According to top down, inside-out theories, any cognitive mismatch of this kind will keep a potential reader from making sense of the text at hand. Thus, a reader can only read (i.e., understand) concepts with which he or she is already familiar.

A comparison of these theories shows that a person who has "cracked the phonetic code" of the Cyrillic alphabet, enabling her to pronounce Russian words correctly although she has no idea what they mean, may be literate from a phonics perspective, but would not be considered literate from a cognitive point of view.

Phonics in Context

The bottom-up, phonics first orientation has dominated the field for many years and is reflected in literacy textbooks, resource materials, teacher guides, and classroom practice. However, many of the more recent materials in ESL literacy have modified the approach somewhat to teach phonics in context. Now the teacher frequently starts with a life skills task, such as a form that requires students to write down their name and phone number, and then moves towards practice with bottom-up skills, such as letter and number identification. While phonics-in-context starts with a meaningful context, many of the subsequent activities are decontextualized and communicatively empty.

Freirean pedagogy, in its traditional form, also includes shifts from literacy in context to decontextualized skills practice. For example, teachers in Spanish literacy programs that follow a Freirean model often start their lessons with a discussions of key words that connote an important issue in the learner's community and then move on to practicing syllables and words out of context (Freire, 1980, p. 82). For example, in communities where housing is a crucial concern, the group might choose to discuss the word "casa" and all its implications. The teacher would then break casa down into ca-sa and subsequently introduce other letter combinations with similar sounds like ca-ma, ca-da, la-na. Thus only the original word has communicative value while subsequent words are presented in isolation and chosen for their phonic similarities, not the ideas they represent. However, neither a life-skills curriculum nor a Freirean approach necessarily requires that reading practice be divorced from context.

Advocates of phonics-based approaches are able to point to research that supports their point of view (Chall, 1989), often citing studies in behaviorism and perception that have been conducted in laboratories under controlled conditions (Smith, 1986). The decoding model has retained its popularity in ESL literacy for a number of reasons: (1) phonics lessons are easy to teach and require little if any outside preparation; (2) materials are readily available; (3) the approach often meets students expectations of what should happen

in a literacy class since new readers often equate knowing the alphabet with literacy; (4) teachers who have little experience with low level students often feel more secure with the structured activities that phonics provides; (5) millions of people all over the world have learned to read by using a phonics-based approach.

Limitations of Phonics

In spite of their popularity, phonics-based approaches have their detractors who feel that teaching letters, syllables, and words out of context may not only be useless (Smith, 1986; Goodman, 1986; Cambourne, 1979), it may even be counterproductive (Wallace, 1988). Those opposed to a phonics-first approach point out that (1) millions of students have learned to read not because of phonics, but in spite of it; (2) thousands of students have already failed phonics in school, (3) asking students to discriminate between similar shapes, letters, and numbers (sometimes referred to as "marking the bunny that looks the other way") only serves to confuse, frustrate, and discourage students; (4) since sound-symbol relationships in English are distressingly irregular (most common words such as "here", "there", and "were" cannot be sounded out), phonics gives students a false sense of security; (5) phonics-based approaches start with what ESL students don't know (decoding), instead of what they do know (making sense out of things that appear unfamiliar); and finally, (6) many if not most learners leave phonics-based programs before they ever get to read anything real or have a chance to express their own ideas in writing.

Meaning Based Approaches and Schema Theory

Approaches that focus on meaning and context instead of letters and sounds are based on research in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology (Goodman, 1986; Beaugrande, 1980; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 1983; Rumelhart, 1985; Smith, 1982a; Smith, 1988). They rely on studies of the information processing strategies that fluent readers use and have found that good readers do not decode every word they read. Nor do they compose their ideas in a linear fashion. Rather, they check out words quickly, "sampling" letters on the page and then matching them to their background knowledge. In effect, they "predict" what a text might say or plan what they might write next. As they read, they continue to confirm their predictions, by moving forward and backward in the text in an effort to create meaning. Similarly, as proficient writers compose, they make changes in their text when a particular idea doesn't make sense or appears confusing. Poor readers, on the other hand, often get stuck on the word level, fail to use their knowledge of the world, and may continue to apply/reapply various word attack skills instead of making use of context. Similarly, poor writers tend to focus on spelling and mechanics and plunge ahead with little consideration for how their ideas connect (Kucer, 1989).

Proponents of meaning-based approaches maintain that the basic processes that underlie reading are essentially the same for everyone - children, adults, non-native speakers and

second language learners - and that non-readers will learn best if they are taught the same strategies that proficient readers and writers use.

The Role of Background Knowledge

Studies in psycho-linguistics and text processing focus heavily on the role of background knowledge in the development of reading and writing, an issue of particular interest in ESL literacy since non-native speakers often have gaps in knowledge which interfere with the comprehension process. Cognitive theory now holds that as we experience the world and as we read, our minds seek to integrate what we already know with the new ideas that we encounter. Experiences and knowledge become encoded in the form of cognitive structures, called schemata. In trying to understand or compose a text, we select the appropriate background knowledge, activate the particular schema needed for comprehension and try to make sense of the meaning behind the words on the page, a process sometimes called "reading from behind the eyes" (Smith, 1982a). In ESL literacy, the relationship between past experience and present reading deserves special consideration since much of what is written in the United States presumes a certain cultural and linguistic knowledge that the learner does not (yet) have. For example, a recently published amnesty book marketed for pre-literate students contains a page that asks students to match the words "pilgrims" with pictures of adults in funny hats sitting at a table eating turkey. Unless students have prior knowledge of U.S. history (or a schema for the origins of Thanksgiving), the task cannot be completed successfully.

Instructional Strategies with a Focus on Meaning

The most widely discussed of the meaning-based approaches is Whole Language, which constitutes both a teaching approach and an educational philosophy. [For a full discussion, see Goodman, 1986 and Kazemek, 1989.] Whole language classrooms that can stand the test of purity are rare in ESL literacy since they require that (1) themes and topics are student-generated or at least linked to students' life experiences, (2) oral and written language remain integrated throughout each lesson, (3) all activities are meaning-based, (4) the emphasis is on strategy development rather than skill acquisition, and (5) evaluations are based on observing and discussing how students use language and literacy rather than on traditional tests.

However, the kind of context-rich, meaning-based activities used in whole language classrooms are increasingly becoming part of ESL literacy. They can now be found in a variety of contexts, including competency-based programs that emphasize life skills, workplace literacy programs that focus on the worker's needs and employer's goals, community literacy programs that focus on empowerment, pre-academic programs that emphasize information processing and text production skills, amnesty programs that

integrate civic themes with ESL development, as well as some Spanish literacy courses and family literacy programs.

Examples of the literacy activities used in those programs include the following:

- * using and producing authentic "texts", such as picking out a birthday card for a schoolmate, selecting a get well card for a neighbor, or making a name tag to put on one's desk.
- * building background knowledge through pictures, films, or discussions (for example, showing a picture of a traffic accident before introducing the idea of a stop sign); showing pictures of Ellis Island to stimulate talk about immigration issues.
- * focusing on processing strategies such as predicting and confirming meaning from context. (for example, watching the television news of a disaster with the sound off and predicting what the speaker might be talking about or guessing the ingredients listed on a can of chili by looking at the picture on the label.)
- * completing a real life literacy task such as following the directions on a coffee machine, checking out a library book, or finding out what time a store will open.
- * using a process approach in writing texts (e.g., stories, postcards, notes for neighbors, letters requesting information, reporting a crime to the police) in which students brainstorm together, generate ideas for their writing, produce an initial draft, revise to clarify, and edit for spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- * using signs and symbols from the students' community such as traffic signs, product logos, billboards, and garage sale announcements to develop print awareness and other initial literacy skills.
- * language experience activities such as describing a visit to the INS, composing one's autobiography, giving an eyewitness account of an accident, or drawing a picture of a family celebration.
- * observing and documenting the reading and writing strategies that students use as they progress through the semester, such as identifying what kinds of reading materials students pick up and how much time they spend with a text, or commenting on the changes between the first draft and the second draft of a student's writing.

Interactive Reading

Literacy educators agree that real life literacy, i.e., reading and writing for a purpose other than classroom practice, always involves both mental and perceptual processes (and in the

case of writing, kinetic skills as well). This is true whether we view the process as primarily cognitive or primarily visual. The debate revolves around how much time should be spent on building global processing strategies and how much on practice of letters and sounds and which process should be primary.

Unlike many native speakers, second language learners may have great difficulty blending top-down and bottom-up processes, since their limited vocabulary and their unfamiliarity with the structure of the language may make it hard to match the appropriate background knowledge with the words on the page (Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988; Eskey, 1988; Grabe, 1988). In recognition of that fact, much of ESL literacy now focuses on "interactive" models that combine global processing with vocabulary development and word identification skills. These models suggest that literacy lessons include activities that help students develop the skills needed to identify letters and words quickly and accurately so that they can develop the automatic processing skills necessary for fluent reading. (Eskey, 1988; Grabe, 1988). Choosing an integrated, interactive approach, however, still requires that literacy teachers decide whether to focus first and foremost on meaning and context or whether to spend most of the classroom time on building letter recognition and decoding skills. The choice merits consideration inasmuch as subscribing to one view over another leads to selecting fundamentally different classroom materials, instructional strategies, and evaluation measures.

Example of an Interactive Lesson

As part of units on family health, nutrition, shopping, or consumer awareness, students may be asked to find the names of different foods in supermarket advertisements in the newspapers, grocery store flyers, labels on cakes and pies, coffee shop menus, magazines that feature nutrition articles, and cookbooks. To help students build word recognition and spelling skills, the teacher might focus on fruits and vegetables that contain the letter "a" (e.g., bananas, pineapples, mangos, papayas, carrots, tomatoes). Students could skim and scan ads and flyers, circle the foods they want to focus on, and compare prices across markets. Later on, the class could use some of these fruits and vegetable to make salsa or a fruit salad in class and then write down the recipe so other classes could use it as well. In follow-up activities, students can talk about the fruits that they loved as children and create other "food stories" that become part of language experience activities. Students can also do class surveys to find out what the most popular foods are or get information from each other on the best places to buy fresh fruits and vegetables in the area. To extend the lesson, the teacher might introduce a Jazz Chant that talks about the American obsession with dieting and then follow-up with a comparison between healthful foods and junk foods. Through activities such as these, students can learn to associate the fruits they already know with their English names and the written representation of these names. They develop a good sight vocabulary by learning to distinguish the names of various fruits and build speed in reading by skimming and scanning through ads, labels, and recipes. They also learn to

focus on both meaning and accuracy by writing down a recipe to share and editing their language experience stories.

On another occasion, as parts of units on work time and vacation time, the teacher may have students mark on a calendar the major holidays in the months of September, November and December and then move on to January and February to mark the dates for Western and Eastern New Years, thus perhaps renewing their hope to find at least some sound/symbol relationships in everyday English. Again, the same words might reappear in different contexts (calendar review, days off from school and from work, celebrations, or discussions regarding overtime and holiday pay.) By "recycling" similar concepts and words through various contexts, teachers can provide their students with a variety of opportunities for interacting with print.

As these examples show, interactive approaches to ESL literacy stress the need to develop top-down and bottom-up strategies jointly. They have a meaning-based, top-down orientation as their initial focus, with a special emphasis on teaching students to predict meaning, confirm their prediction by looking at context, and correct their interpretations where necessary. Only after giving students a sense of the meaning and functions of print, does the teacher move towards building an awareness of letter shapes and word recognition, again striving to present a meaningful context throughout.

Reading Readiness

Much of the discussion on teaching literacy to new readers focuses on reading readiness activities for students who are pre-literate and are unfamiliar with the very concept of print, along with those who are not literate in their own language and those who use a non-Roman alphabet. In this approach, the teacher develops a series of activities designed to teach students how to associate real objects with pictures, tell certain shapes from other shapes, and build letter discrimination skills. Similarly, students who have never written anything before are encouraged to engage in pre-writing activities that develop the kinetic skills of holding a pencil and then move towards tracing letters and shapes in a notebook or copying them from the blackboard. (For an excellent overview of reading readiness activities see Savage, 1985 [1984], which includes examples from the following: Haverson, 1980; Haverson & Haynes, 1980; Longfield, 1981; Mrowicki, 1983).

Building Print Awareness

Instead of (or in addition to) the reading readiness outlined above, some educators now propose that teachers focus on helping students develop what is called "print awareness". Under this model, students are encouraged to see, collect, and respond to the print that surrounds them and thus slowly develop a sense for the functions and uses of print. Since they now live in "print-rich" communities, students have ample opportunities to see graffiti,

signs, labels, announcements, ads, product names, and flyers that contain written messages. Students may go on field trips into the community, to stores and markets, and collect ideas and examples of the print that they want to read. The teacher might take pictures or slides to present in class and then later on try to reduce the onslaught of print to manageable text forms so that students can focus on messages that correspond to their individual levels of language proficiency and print sophistication. This notion of selecting print meaningful to the student parallels the concept of comprehensible input used in ESL teaching (Hill & Rabideau, 1989; Krashen, 1985).

At the print awareness level, students are not asked to read or write anything in the conventional sense; the teacher merely helps them to develop a sense of what print looks like (i.e., how it is different from a picture or the wallpaper, which merely exists as decoration) (Smith, 1986). In regard to preparing students who use a non-Roman alphabet, proponents of a print-awareness approach like to point out that students need to develop a global sense of the shape and look of English writing before focusing on individual words and letters.

Introducing Environmental Print

One promising approach for extending print awareness is the use of environmental print to support emerging literacy. In this approach, the teacher collects photographs, products, and artifacts in which print is heavily supported by a non-verbal context (e.g., a dollar bill, a tube of toothpaste; a bottle of common household cleaner; cans or packages with labels that show pictures of the contents, such as beans, water chestnuts, or bags of potato chips or rice; photographs of the Golden Arches, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Arco gas station, K-mart, People's Drugs, or the local taqueria). Through the use of print found in the community, teachers begin to show students that they already know how to read in a way (i.e., they are able to make a hypothesis about meaning and confirm it through checking both context and print). To build on students' coping strategies, the teacher might ask them to work in groups and discuss what a sign might say. As the class progresses, the non-print context is slowly reduced. For example, a teacher may ask students what sodas they or their children drink and then bring in cans of Coca Cola or 7-Up. Students select what drink they want by "reading" the label on the appropriate can. These activities are then repeated with other items familiar to the students (e.g., money). During the next step, the teacher will move away from the real product and introduce a picture of the item or a flattened label pasted onto paper so that both print and logo are visible and easy to read. Finally, the name of the item appears in print form only, perhaps as part of a grocery list or a cash register receipt. Similar activities can be built around community services that students use (police, social service, hospital, schools), gas stations where they fill up their tanks, fast food places where they take their children (or their children take them), and department or discount stores where they shop.

Like other examples of interactive reading, an environmental print approach never introduces letters, words, and syllables in isolation, but starts with words that present a whole text (e.g., a label that says "POISON", a door marked "EXIT", "911" tagged to the refrigerator door, "LADIES" on a restroom door or a WALK/DON'T WALK sign. This approach assumes that non-literate adults and those from pre-literate societies who are now living in the U.S. can learn to make sense out of print in the same way they learn to understand other aspects of their social and physical environment.

Ethnographic Approaches

There is now an increasing thrust towards helping students to discover the distinctive features of the writing system they want to acquire. Through ethnographic approaches that include visits outside of the classroom, students are encouraged to use the knowledge and survival skills they have developed while living in this country to make hypotheses about both the functions and uses of print and the individual forms that messages can take. Similarly, teachers are starting to pay attention to the print awareness that their students bring to school and the coping strategies they have been using to access print in the community and in their daily lives (Heath, 1983; Heath, 1986; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Weinstein-Shr & Lewis, 1989).

Conclusion

Students come to ESL literacy programs from varied backgrounds, with different experiences and different levels of proficiency. They may also have different expectations, varying perceptions of what constitutes meaningful reading and writing, and preferred styles of learning. Similarly, literacy teachers differ in their life experiences, prefer one style of teaching over another, vary in their levels of experience, and spend differential amounts of time and enthusiasm on teaching. These factors make the literacy enterprise a challenge for everyone.

One thing however, seems clear: Literacy is a complex, language-based, culture-bound process that requires that learners bring meaning to print at the same time as they get meaning from print. Since the ability to read and write relies heavily on spoken language development, cultural identification, background knowledge, and familiarity with how words are put together, ESL literacy students need to acquire these skills at the same time that they are learning how to deal with print. They thus face multiple challenges: (1) how to acquire the oral language skills needed to understand messages in English, (2) how to use their own knowledge of the world to make sense out of the written word, (3) how to develop the vocabulary and conceptual knowledge that defines the culture encoded in texts, (4) how to interpret print and express their own ideas in writing, and (5) how to develop the automatic processing skills needed for fluent reading and writing. While there is no one

best way to teach literacy, an integrated approach that addresses all of these needs during various points of the lesson seems to hold the greatest promise.

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4. ASSESSING ESL LITERACY: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"You can't send that to Springfield."

Massachusetts funder responding to a teacher who explains how she gets a good sense of her students's progress by observing what they do in the classroom. (quoted in Balliro, 1989)

Assessment has become a thorny issue for adult literacy programs. On the one hand, there is the demand for accountability and the need to compare successes and failures across programs; on the other hand, there is the desire to implement assessments that document student progress over time and feed back into classroom teaching. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that no consensus exists on what constitutes appropriate assessment for reading and writing, nor does the field agree on how literacy is best defined.

Developing appropriate literacy assessments for adults with limited English proficiency is especially problematic since ESL literacy development depends on a number of factors such as educational level, background knowledge, literacy in the first language, and oral/aural proficiency in English. Bell and Burnaby suggest that in order to provide sufficient relevant data, an ESL literacy assessment should minimally focus on

- * the amount of schooling the student has had in the home country and in the U.S. since both can provide gross indications of overall literacy levels;
- * the extent of native language literacy so the program can assess which skills and strategies need to be introduced "from scratch" and which can be transferred. This includes experience with reading and writing in general as well as facility with the Roman alphabet system;
- * general proficiency in ESL, including speaking and listening, to decide whether difficulty with literacy stems from lack of experience with the structure and vocabulary of English or from difficulties with reading and writing (Bell & Burnaby, 1984).

Henderson and Moriarty, in their introduction to the HELP test, suggest that literacy assessments also evaluate to what extent students (1) possess the functional manipulative skills needed in writing (such as working with a pencil), (2) have developed familiarity with classroom behavior such as responding to teacher requests, and (3) are able to keep up with the learning pace commonly used in a beginning ESL class (Henderson & Moriarty, 1982). Others point out that a student's literacy goals, as well as the functions and uses of literacy in the student's community, need to be part of an initial assessment (Auerbach, 1990a; Heath, 1986; Heath 1983; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Sterling, 1989; Weinstein-Shr, 1989b).

Assessing Beginning Levels of Literacy

Many programs are unhappy with current assessments because they are not suitable for the broad range of students whose literacy skills need to be evaluated. Among those non-literate in English, the range encompasses both students with no or very little experience in reading and writing in their native language and those who have had many years of formal education in their home countries but little meaningful exposure to English texts. Most commercially available tests do not discriminate well on the lower levels of the literacy continuum since they already assume a certain level of reading and writing skills. Some assessments, even though they require reading per se, demand that the test taker match a visual clue (for example, a question heard as part of a video presentation) to the correct answer on an electronically scored answer sheet. The test taker must then "bubble in" the appropriate response on the sheet, a fairly sophisticated skill for those with little experience in test taking.

Assessing Literacy in Context

Many practitioners find current literacy assessments wanting because of their over-reliance on the testing of basic decoding skills. Since there is now an increasing emphasis on meaning-based approaches and literacy in context, teachers find that the field needs to develop assessments that include a top-down perspective, especially for beginning students. Programs need ways of assessing how well a particular student can deal with print in context and where on the literacy continuum his or her abilities lie. Teachers are also asking for assessment that show how well students can link their own background knowledge to print, thus allowing programs to identify strengths and out-of-school cultural knowledge along with traditional literacy skills. In referring to Belenky's Women's Way of Knowing, Sterling suggests that the field develop a framework for a powerful understanding of learners' ability and potential so that participants come to see "their existing knowledge as an essential link to the changes they wish to make in the lives" (Sterling, 1989, p. 55).

Collaborating in Developing Student Centered Assessments

One objection to traditional literacy assessments concerns the fact that standardized, norm- or criterion-referenced tests do not reflect the philosophy or educational focus of many literacy programs. These assessments, by definition, require pre-established standard conditions that do not allow for collaborative efforts that would serve the needs of teachers, learners, and program administrators more directly. Wolfe points towards the need to redefine the role of the learners so that they can become involved in identifying their goals and purposes for literacy, choosing materials to be read during an assessment and the writings they want to have reviewed or providing self-reports of progress in journals and in peer interviews. She further suggests that assessments should be done "with" adults, rather than "to" them (Wolfe, 1988, p. 4). Some programs are beginning to think about assessment

as a "service provided to the participants and teachers in the program, rather than a vehicle for funding sources to monitor success according to abstract, generalized standards" (Sterling, 1989, p. 52).

Curriculum Based Assessment: Linking Assessments with Teaching

Many ESL literacy educators feel that they and their students are cut off from the assessment process. They object to the fact that test results in the form of levels and scores disappear in student files without ever being interpreted in meaningful ways to teachers or learners (Balliro, 1989). They are concerned that standard assessments neither reflect nor feed into the kind of literacy teaching that the field now advocates and thus are incongruent with good practice. In fact, some suggest that measurement instruments may even contradict what teachers know about the way their students read and write (Griswold, 1989) and thus become counterproductive for the purposes of learning and teaching literacy. In the context of adult education programs for women, Sterling suggests that learners have an increasing role "in determining their own definitions of success and that the ongoing services be modified according to those definitions" (Sterling, 1989, p. 54).

In reaction to conventional pre- and post-tests that look solely for pre-determined responses and judge achievement by external standards, teachers are now asking for assessments that reflect the focus of their teaching; that is, they are looking for ways to evaluate how students go about learning to read and write, so that they can help them develop strategies for becoming more successful in that process. Both researchers and practitioners stress the need for instruments that help document how students manage to link experience with print and how they go about interpreting and expressing meaning in written form (Auerbach, 1990a; Balliro, 1989; Kucer, 1989; Lytle et al., 1986; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Sticht, 1990; Wolfe, 1988; Collignon & Isserlis, 1990).

Standardized Testing

As a rule, literacy educators recognize the importance of diagnostic assessments and acknowledge the need for public accountability and comparisons across programs. At issue is the extent to which current assessments both provide that accountability and serve useful functions for the purpose of teaching.

Contrary to popular belief, the U.S. Department of Education does not select or approve standardized tests for states to use in their adult education programs. Nor does the federal government demand that all students be tested. Adult education programs that receive federal funding are merely required by law to provide standardized test data as one indicator of program effectiveness, and a state need not have standardized test data for every student. The states, themselves, do indeed have the flexibility to determine which criteria to use in

measuring effectiveness within the federal framework for reviews and evaluations (Sticht, 1990).

According to Sticht, the responses from the field to these requirements vary. On the one hand, there are states that express serious concerns about any requirement for standardized testing, suggesting that these demands be dropped or made optional. On the other hand, there are states that would like to see the federal government indicate which tests should be used for assessment purposes and thus lighten their burden of decision making.

Similar confusion exists about the demands for standardized tests from state agencies and other funding sources. As Balliro shows in her interviews with funders, at times state departments set performance criteria (e.g., job placement) as indicators of effectiveness, at other times a funding source may require standardized test data because they appear scientific and objective. She suggests that teachers work together (and be paid to work together) to develop instruments that clearly show what happens in classrooms and document the progress that students are making. These assessments can then be presented as "authoritative, socially scientific packages" more acceptable to those outside of the classroom, that can indeed "be sent to Springfield" (Balliro, 1989, p. 23).

Traditionally, most ESL and adult literacy programs have used some form of commercially available standardized test to report student data to their funding source, be it federal, state, private non-profit, or a combination thereof. The most commonly used tests have been group-administered adult basic skills tests such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) or the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE). ESL programs have often used group-administered ESL tests such as the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) (which includes an oral interview section) and the ESL version of the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS/ESL). Other assessments are used by volunteer organizations in which the individual volunteer administers the test to the learner. One such test is the Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ), used by the Literacy Volunteers of America (Sticht, 1990; Jackson, 1990).

In ESL literacy programs throughout the U.S., standardized tests are used for a variety of reasons:

- * They can be scored immediately and accurately.
- * They provide data to the funding source and may document the need for further funding in quantifiable ways. They often in and of themselves count as evidence of responsibility and accountability on the part of the program.
- * They act as an external reference point and allow for the comparison of data across programs. In addition, they provide information on student skill and proficiency levels as defined by national standards, such as the MELT or APL levels.

- * Comparative test scores may allow for an evaluation of the differential impact similar programs have on the literacy development of their students.
- * They provide experience for students in taking tests. They thus foster the kind of test-taking ability that enable students to cope with the standardized tests pervasive in the U.S., tests that may act as a gateway to occupational and academic programs.
- * Test scores provide feedback to students who want to know how they are faring.
- * Most tests are easy to administer and to score. They are "teacher proof" and don't require extensive staff development efforts before they can be implemented.

Assessing Literacy at the Lower Levels

There are presently very few assessments, standardized or not, that yield sufficient data on student literacy levels at the lower end of the reading and writing scale. Discussions in the literature suggest that present assessments need to be adapted or new, perhaps alternative, ways developed to provide information on student levels in the following areas:

1. Print awareness:

This section could measure how well students can

- * tell print from non-print background or "decoration";
- * associate print with meaning;
- * differentiate between various scripts (e.g., by asking students to indicate which sign is written in their language and which sign is written in English);
- * understand the directionality of print (e.g., Does the student hold a piece of paper right side up instead of upside down when asked to look it over? Does the student use top to bottom and left to right eye movements to find a picture on a page or a number?).

2. Emergent Literacy:

This section could indicate whether a student is able to use prior knowledge and context clues to "guess" at the meaning of print. As part of such an assessment, students could be asked to pick out realia (such as the can labelled Coca Cola or another commonly-known, culturally appropriate product). An emergent literacy section could also include such

reading readiness skills as being able to discriminate among letters and shapes and being able to use a pencil.

3. Initial Literacy:

In this part of the assessment, students might be asked to read signs and labels that appear on paper, requiring them to use both context information and letter clues (examples could include reading signs and logos such as K-Mart, Exxon gas, or STOP). Bottom-up skills could include knowing the names of some of the letters of the alphabet and being able to write one's name.

4. Beginning Literacy:

This section could focus on items in which the context is largely word-based. For example, students could be asked to choose the name tag with their name on it or to find the name of their city on a large highway sign. Basic writing might include writing down one's name, address, and social security number.

Promising Practices in Alternative Assessment

Concerns about obtaining valid measures of learners' literacy development, dissatisfaction with assessments and curricula that appear imposed on students and teachers, and the problem of linking standard assessments to program goals and classroom practice have created a growing interest in alternative assessments that are participatory, program-based, and student-centered.

Alternative assessments tend to share the following characteristics: They involve students in the evaluation process. They show literacy progress over time. They reflect current theory of reading and writing. They inform curriculum decisions, and they support classroom practice.

Alternative assessments may include the following components:

1. Planning conferences:

Held twice a year, these involve students in gathering information about their lives, their perceptions of what constitutes reading and writing, their goals and objectives, their interests, and the strategies they use in selecting materials to read and write (Metz, 1989).

2. Informal interviews:

In these informal interviews with students, teachers and counselors make note of the life-experiences of students, along with their concerns and interests, so that relevant thematic units and picture files can be developed. Interviews and conferences can also help identify the type of reading and writing learners already do or would like to do and the kind of domains that involve reading and writing (home, church, community, school, job). During these sessions students can also evaluate their own ability and the progress they are making.

3. Environmental print activities:

As part of these activities, students and teachers collect and bring to class products, labels, charts, announcements, and pictures of signs that they find intriguing and would like to know more about. Teachers develop various activities that require interaction between the learner and the print materials, and they then observe individuals and groups to document strategies they are using to determine context, predict meaning, use letter cues, and confirm their predictions.

4. Reading Files and Free Reading Logs:

Teachers and students record in files or logs the books and articles that they have read. The file could be an index box in which students place cards that indicate what they read and when they read it. Some room on the cards would be left blank for comments (did the student like the book? was it confusing, interesting?) (Hill, 1989). Kucer suggests having students fill out a form containing categories such as "Date," "What did you read," "How much did you read," (all, most, some) and "How did you like it" (good, ok, not good). Such files and logs then serve as documentation of both the types of materials and the quantity of reading that students do over time (Kucer, 1989, Table 3).

5. Portfolio development/writing folders:

Teachers and students keep track of changes in writing with a portfolio or folder. Each student has a folder that contains pieces of writing from the beginning of the class; these include scraps, notes, drawings, lists, drafts, revisions, and final pieces. Examples include language experience stories, charts and grids filled out during group discussions, classroom news, letters to friends and classmates, favorite words, and journal entries. All pieces are dated so that teachers and students get a real sense of student growth. At periodic intervals, teachers and students discuss the pieces -- students might choose their favorite writing -- and comment on changes such as the topics chosen, lengths of writings, greater ease with words, brainstorming or revision strategies that the student used, and changes in the mechanics of writing (staying within the lines, spelling, capitalization) (Hill, 1989; Collignon & Isserlis,

1990). Discussions and evaluation of materials can be broken down into areas such as strategies that are meta-cognitive (thinking about, evaluating, and planning the work), cognitive (vocabulary, concepts knowledge, and using language and structure appropriate to the task), and affective (thinking of yourself as a writer, greater confidence in writing ability, seeing a value in literacy) (Sticht, 1990).

6. Learner evaluation grids:

These guide teachers in observing and commenting on student interaction with print. In their work sheets for teachers, Collignon and Isserlis include encoding letter/word identification and visual discrimination skills as part of the cognitive category. They also add an interactive category that identifies how learners collaborate in their interactions with print and what strategies they use to help each other. Kucer suggests an evaluation chart that focuses on the basic strategies for reading and writing that learners use. The chart identifies processes such as "generates and organizes major ideas" (e.g., "getting the big picture" in reading or coming up with an idea for a story), "uses a variety of text aids" (e.g., pictures, titles, charts), "uses relevant background and linguistic knowledge" (e.g., context, grapho-phonemic, and syntactic cues), and "takes risks" (i.e., shows a willingness to make mistakes). Kucer suggests fourteen of these processes and encourages teachers to mark "Yes", "Somewhat," or "No" as they observe the reading and writing strategies their students use in class (Kucer, 1989; Collignon & Isserlis, 1990). (For a review of issues related to alternative assessment, see the evaluation chapter in Auerbach 1990.)

Selecting Appropriate Assessment Measures

Finding ways to assess literacy that work for all of those involved in and connected to a program (e.g., legislators, funding sources, administrators, teachers, and students) and providing the information needed by all levels (policy, program, curriculum, classroom) is a challenge that might be best accomplished through collaborative efforts. As programs select a test or decide to develop their own assessments, they might keep the following questions in mind:

1. What are our purposes in choosing an assessment?

- * to document the success of the program to an outside source (such as a funder source)
- * to determine the need for classes especially designed for literacy students
- * to comply with federal, state, or local requirements

- * to diagnose student levels of proficiency so they can be placed in the appropriate class
 - * to document student literacy achievement
 - * to identify the processes and strategies that students use as they interact with print in the classroom
 - * to provide feedback to students and teachers
 - * to keep the curriculum responsive to student and teacher needs
2. Is the test clearly designed as an assessment of literacy (not just ESL) or does it minimally have a literacy component?
 3. Is there a clear relationship between literacy assessment, the needs of the students, and the goal of the program? If not, what steps are being taken to align assessment efforts with the program focus?
 4. Does the test adequately differentiate on the lower levels of the literacy continuum? If not, what other measures need to be developed to identify levels of print awareness and emergent and initial literacy?
 5. Is there more than one source of assessment, such as self-evaluation, interview, and pencil and paper assessment?
 6. Does the test focus on literacy use, i.e., what students can do with literacy, or does it merely identify letter and word recognition skills?
 7. Does the assessment identify students' strengths? Is the assessment likely to confuse or frustrate students or make them feel stupid? How can this situation be remedied?
 8. Does the assessment satisfy the funding source but provide little information to teachers, students, and curriculum developers? How can the situation be changed?
 9. Does the assessment work well for all levels of the program (administration, curriculum, classroom), but is not acceptable to the funding source? How can the program work towards acceptance of its alternative assessment efforts?
 10. Is there a quick turn-around between the time the assessment is given and the time students and teachers hear the results? Are the results interpreted in a way that makes sense to teachers and students?

11. Is there a clear relationship between the test and the curriculum? Is there a feedback loop between the curriculum and the assessment so that a change in one is reflected in the other?
12. Does the assessment allow for teacher and student input and participation?
13. Does the assessment differentiate between various literacies such as functional literacy (completing everyday literacy tasks), prose literacy (understanding text commonly found in news-papers or textbooks), and document literacy (figuring out what a certain form might be all about or recognizing official notices that require a response)?
14. Does the assessment evaluate both reading comprehension and writing skills?

It is now a generally accepted wisdom in education that no single measure should serve as the basis for assessing and evaluating student ability. Programs that are mandated to use certain standardized tests might consider advocating better and more relevant tests while, at the same time, instituting alternative assessments that are more learner-centered. As the need for program-based evaluation of literacy education continues, staff development efforts need to focus on helping teachers develop assessments that document the gains that students are making in acquiring greater literacy. Finally, the field needs to work towards procedures and processes that document progress in literacy in ways that are acceptable and comprehensible to those outside of the teaching community.

Note: Later versions of this paper will review the most recent (1990) literature on participatory assessment.

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5. BILITERACY AND SPANISH LANGUAGE LITERACY

Introduction

Teaching literacy in the native language/mother tongue of the learners is one of the best options for programs serving non-literate learners who share a common language. Learning to read and write in a language they understand, instead of in a language they are trying to acquire, affords students a measure of power and control that is not easily matched in an adult ESL literacy class. While native language literacy classes may be offered in any language (classes exist in Hmong and Haitian Creole for example), Spanish is by far the most dominant, a fact that is not surprising given the large number of Spanish speakers in the United States.

Programs that offer mother tongue literacy differ in their aims. Some have full biliteracy and bilingualism as their goal. They see the mother tongue as inextricably bound to ethnic and cultural identity and seek to maintain the cultural and linguistic roots of the community through literacy.¹ Others see literacy acquisition in the native language primarily as a stepping stone to English literacy. They recognize that knowledge of the writing system of one's first language is an important tool in acquiring literacy in a second (or additional) language. Yet, no matter what their aims, these programs have found literacy in the native tongue to be highly effective in introducing reading and writing to adults who are new to literacy.

This section discusses research findings on the use of the native language in teaching and examines the special issues raised by using the native language of the learners in teaching.

The case for using native language

While there are no large scale research studies that show the exact relationship between native language literacy and English literacy in adults, there are some indications that first language literacy skills result in greater competency in the second language.² Although more research is needed to determine the degree to which literacy skills in one language aid or impede the learning of literacy in the other, it is now generally acknowledged that it is easier to learn to read and write in a language one fully understands. Because reading is based on oral language, learners who are still struggling with English will learn to read more quickly in their native language.

Relationship between first and second language literacy

Research conducted with children provides strong support for the hypothesis that literacy in the native language is strongly related to literacy in an additional language.³ There is

also considerable evidence that, even when the language in question uses a different writing system, readers are able to apply the visual, linguistic, and cognitive strategies they use in first language reading to reading in the second language.⁴

Perhaps the most exhaustive discussion of the interrelationship among first language literacy, second language acquisition, and the development of cognitive skills is provided by Cummins.⁵ His interdependence hypothesis holds that literacy skills learned in the first language transfer to the second language, thus establishing one common underlying language proficiency. Cummins holds that strong literacy in the first language will facilitate not only literacy in English, but will form the foundation for acquiring the cognitive skills needed for academic success. While Cummins's theories have formed the basis of many mother tongue literacy classes, further research may be needed to determine to what extent such transfers are aided or inhibited by social, cultural, and psychological factors.⁶ Hornberger, for example, suggests that the contexts for biliteracy need to be examined before the full benefits of literacy in the native language teaching can be understood.

When to teach literacy in the native language

Should literacy always be introduced in the native language of the learners? Research suggests that the answer depends on a variety of factors. The program context, attitudes of learners and teachers toward learning native language literacy, and the status of both languages in the wider community may all play a role.⁷ In her framework for biliteracy, Hornberger suggests that the success of native language literacy programs depends on

- which languages are promoted by the community or by the society at large
- how much either language is valued in the home, the schools, and the community
- to what extent the speakers depend on oral versus written communication.⁸

In the experience of many adult literacy programs, the size of the language group and the educational background of the learners are also key factors in determining whether literacy should be introduced in the mother tongue or in English. There now is general agreement that adults with few years of schooling in their home countries, who have not acquired literacy on their own, can greatly benefit from a native language literacy program. Such programs can either be offered in conjunction with a class focusing on oral communication in English or in sequence with an English literacy class.

Language diversity: a resource or a problem

One of the factors that influences program success deals with societal and individual attitudes toward biliteracy. Research has shown that the degree to which native language literacy is recognized and valued in the U.S. varies widely.⁹ Three common viewpoints are frequently voiced regarding language diversity. As Ruiz points out, language diversity can be seen as either a "resource" or a "problem." The resource orientation sees both economic and personal benefit in multilingualism, regarding the language skills of immigrants as a resource that should be conserved and developed, particularly in schools and the workplace. This orientation sees mother tongue literacy as an important economic asset that can help workers reap the economic benefits of the skills they already have.

The language diversity as "problem" orientation, however, views cultural diversity as a weakness to be overcome rather than one of the country's greatest strengths. Advocates of this view often see English mono-lingualism as the only acceptable social condition.

A third orientation chooses to ignore non-English literacy, considering English literacy as the "only literacy that counts."¹⁰ When this orientation shapes policy, several negative outcomes may result: (1) important knowledge and skills are ignored, (2) literacy surveys present a skewed picture of the true levels of reading and writing of the population, (3) program decisions are made on false premises, and (4) learners are defined by what they don't know (English), rather than what they do know (their mother tongue).

There now is agreement in the field that positive language attitudes promote self-esteem and that increased self-esteem is an important corollary to literacy development. In light of these views, many innovative programs support a native-language-as-a-resource orientation to literacy.

Responding to learner expectations

Learner attitudes and expectations can also influence the success of both native language and ESL literacy. Adults in ESL literacy programs often want to learn English as fast as possible and sometimes see learning to read and write in the native language as a roundabout way of achieving their goal. Innovative programs have found four strategies helpful in introducing the idea of native language literacy to their students:

1. Respond to the concerns of learners. Some learners express a desire only to learn literacy in English and not in their native language. With these learners, it is best to acknowledge their concern that literacy in the native language might hold them back or impede their progress in learning English.
2. Discuss the nature of literacy development and show that literacy develops fastest if it is linked to a language the learner already speaks.

3. Give examples that show how adults with literacy in their native language acquire literacy in English more easily.
4. Present various opportunities that allow learners to experiment with literacy in English and in the native language and offer a choice of classes. Ask learners with only a few years of schooling to give native language literacy a chance for a few weeks and then let them decide which class to pursue.

Curriculum materials

One problem in teaching literacy in a language other than English to language minority adults is the lack of appropriate curriculum materials. Beginning Spanish language materials are available from Latin America but may not be appropriate for many programs. According to Arango, many of these materials are designed for peasant groups and are not as relevant in an urban context. Some contain local-specific vocabulary which is not widely used or understood. Others are designed for political purposes such as "civic-military campaigns." These books can contain aggressive ideological content which may offend some learners.¹¹ Appropriate materials for other languages are equally difficult to find.

Many innovative programs have found that the extensive use of textbooks can inhibit an approach based on student experience. Not only are the themes in such materials predetermined but, many times, they have little to do with the current circumstances of the students.¹² Since it is difficult to find materials that are responsive to the diverse cultural and language background of the learners and allow for original contributions by students, many teachers prefer teacher-assembled kits or learner-generated materials rather than commercially published textbooks.

Learner assessment, placement, and program evaluation

Adequate methods of testing adults in their native language are not widely available. Since few standardized tests have been designed, most programs have developed their own forms of assessing their students. Peggy Dean describes how assessment in adult Spanish literacy programs can be achieved using alternative assessments.

Individual files were kept of examples of student work sheets, and math tests along with classroom observations. Progress, needs and performance levels were kept to aid teachers in best directing the students ... [T]his material was used to demonstrate to an individual that they had mastered the material and should reach out into more challenging areas.¹³

In many programs, the latter outcome — students learning that they "can" and "do" learn — is one of the most significant results for those adults who, for whatever reasons, can only stay with a program for a short time.

Program evaluations often rely on learner input. For example, in addition to using retention and class attendance as indicators of program success, Young and Padilla measured the impact of their Spanish literacy program at the individual level by documenting what students accomplished once they had graduated. Some examples of these accomplishments include the publication of two poems in a book by one graduate and an award won by another student for helping to maintain bilingual programs in the school district.¹⁴

Program models for teaching literacy in the native language

When used in ESL literacy programs, mother tongue literacy classes essentially follow one of three models:

1. In the bilingual model, literacy in the native language is taught alongside English language development. This model has the advantage of allowing learners to acquire literacy and English simultaneously, an option that is attractive to many learners who want to learn both as soon as possible. The bilingual model requires a teacher who is both bilingual and knowledgeable about literacy development and second language acquisition.¹⁵
2. In the coordinate model, learners participate both in a native language literacy class and an ESL class. In this model, class time can either be split between a literacy and an ESL component, or the classes can be offered one after the other during the same teaching cycle. This model does not require bilingual teachers. However, it does require that one teacher share the language of the learners and understand literacy issues and that a second teacher be experienced in ESL teaching.
3. In the sequential model, non-literate learners start by taking a native language literacy class. Once they have acquired a certain threshold level of literacy, they transition to an ESL class. This model has the same staffing requirements as the coordinate model, but carries with it the danger that some learners become impatient about not learning English soon enough.

Summary

In summary, the literature on native language literacy suggests that acquiring literacy skills on one's own language has benefits both for the actual transference of skills from one language to the other (although research on adults is only just beginning), but also for the improvement in the classroom situation that results when adults can use a familiar tool (native language) to express themselves. For the latter reason, native language literacy programs may be particularly effective in encouraging students to participate in all aspect of a program.

Endnotes

1. As Hornberger points out, in many cases, both prevalent language policies and community contexts mitigate against the development of full biliteracy and the maintenance of the native language (Hornberger, 1992).
2. See Penfield, 1986, p. 50 citing the work of Robson & Burtoff.
3. See Swain, et al., 1989.
4. See Ovando & Collier, 1985.
5. See Cummins, 1979.
6. See McGroarty, 1988.
7. See Ogbu, 1990; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988; Hornberger, 1989; Reder, 1987.
8. See Hornberger, 1989.
9. See Macias, 1990; Ruiz, 1988; Leibowitz, 1969.
10. For a more extensive discussion of these issues, see Macias, 1990; Macias, in press; and Wiley, 1991.
11. See Arango, 1989.
12. See Arango, 1989.
13. See Dean, 1989, p. 8.
14. See Young & Padilla, 1990.
15. See Rivera, 1990.

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6. PROMISING PRACTICES: THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

Introduction

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) may be one of the most effective ways of teaching ESL literacy to beginning readers. It integrates oral and written skills by using the students' ideas and language as the basis for reading and writing. The premise of LEA is that, when materials are meaningful to students, they will be more motivated to read. Furthermore, since the ideas, language structures, and vocabulary for a language experience text come from the students themselves, all initial reading will automatically be geared to the students' level of proficiency.

LEA is "often a component of the whole language approach to the teaching of reading and writing" (Simich-Dudgeon, 1989, p.5). Stahl and Miller cite the following commonalities between the whole language and LEA approaches:

- 1) both approaches stress the importance of the [student's] own language productions as a bridge from oral to written language; 2) both ... decry the use of skill sequences to organize instruction; ... [and] both ... stress the importance of focusing on the meaningfulness of language and of not changing the focus to parts of nonmeaningful segments of language, such as individual sound-symbol relationships, unless that instruction is done within the context of a whole text. (Stahl & Miller, 1989, p. 88)

Bright and his colleagues assert that a successful ESL literacy curriculum should have a strong oral component and that "oral language should be introduced first in contexts that are personal and concrete for the learners" (Bright et al., 1982). This approach assumes that students need practice listening and speaking in English before they are introduced to reading and writing in English. LEA follows a sequence in which all students start as "authors" expressing their ideas orally and dictating them to a literate person (a "scribe") in the classroom. The text, as composed by the author and written down by the scribe, then becomes the basis for reading, the starting point for further compositions, and the impetus for discussions about the relationship between oral language and writing.

Advantages/Strengths of LEA

The emphasis on using a student's ideas and words in the preparation of beginning reading materials makes Language Experience especially appropriate for immigrants who are faced not only with the need to learn a new language but also with the necessity of making adjustments to a new culture. In this teaching approach, students are assumed to possess skills and knowledge when they enter the class, even though they may be new readers and may have doubts about their ability to learn. Language Experience takes advantage of the students'

experience, knowledge, and interests to create a text of relevance to the reader (Rabideau, 1988, p. 8). LEA activities also provide teachers with valuable information and insights about their students' backgrounds and attitudes toward literacy and learning, which can then be incorporated into instructional approaches and follow-up lessons. In allowing non-literate students to retain "authorship" of their ideas and by using more advanced students as "transcription experts," LEA supports both learner-centered and multilevel teaching.

LEA as a learner-centered approach to culture and language

In many programs teachers find it difficult to locate materials for their students that are culturally appropriate. LEA avoids this problem because students generate their own readings based on their own experience. All materials thus reflect the student's perception of culture (see Simich-Dudgeon, 1989, p. 5). By encouraging students to express and record their thoughts, ideas, and aspirations, as well as to read and understand the thinking of others, new cultural information is not imposed from the outside, but rather is explored through a comparison of different texts.

LEA does not impose a specific proficiency level on the learner. By using students as the source of many language activities,

LEA capitalizes upon the storehouse of listening and speaking vocabularies that the students either possess or develop at home or in school -- in English or any other language. Quite often this storehouse of words exceeds by far the restricted vocabulary found in standard basal reading texts. The LEA approach values the language and thinking of each student based upon their personal experiences, faulty as it may be, as a beginning point for further development. [The assumption in LEA/ESL is that] each student brings to school a unique language personality, and that personality needs to be preserved while English skills are being developed. (Levenson, 1979, p. 39)

Models of LEA: Native Language Literacy and ESL

Depending on the group and on the availability of staff, a variety of models are possible with the LEA approach. There are three basic ways of implementing the approach with LEP non-literate students: through the use of native language only, through a bilingual approach, or through English only.

Teaching LEA in Native Language

Although opinions may vary, for some educators, teaching LEA in its purest form implies that the student's dominant language should be used. Levenson (1979) and Een (in Rabideau, 1989b) argue that LEA is most effective when the beginning literacy student is taught in the native

language. Others suggest a bilingual approach in which students create a story in English and then use the first language to clarify the meaning of a particular word or to discuss how grammar works. But Ringel and Smith (1989) discourage bilingual LEA instruction because they believe that translating may hinder the learning of English.

In general, literacy programs which teach LEA in the native language are able to put a great deal of emphasis on facilitating students' self-expression and on helping them explore attitudes about literacy itself (Nash et al., 1989; Literacy Assistance Center, 1988). LEA in the native language can help students to discuss issues, feelings, ideas, and experiences among themselves and then to translate their oral language into a written text (Kazemek, 1989).

In some programs which use LEA (such as the one described in D'Annunzio & Payne, 1989), students relate their LEA stories in their native language, and then a bilingual tutor translates and immediately transcribes what was said into English. This has been called a "combined" approach (Whole language, c.1989). For many, however, this method does not follow the intent of the LEA model, which is to use the exact words, structures, and stylistic phrasings that the students use.

Clearly, how the native language is employed in the literacy classroom will depend on the make-up of the classroom and the availability of instructors who are bilingual or qualified to teach native language literacy (Penfield, 1986). Using the native language has many advantages since the experiences, thoughts, and events that students can describe in their own language can easily turn into stories, essays, poems, and other forms of extended discourse. Since LEA was originally designed for students who speak English fluently but do not know how to read and write, it must necessarily be adapted before it can be used with adults who have only limited proficiency in English. Teachers often find that the greatest challenge their ESL students face is understanding the vocabulary and structure of the new language while they are trying to pick up literacy skills. A strong oral language component must therefore be included so that ESL students can develop the language needed to describe events, express thoughts and feelings, or tell the kind of story that makes LEA so effective.

Description of Procedures/Techniques

A variety of activities may be used in LEA. What follows is a composite description of LEA procedures and a discussion of the special issues that need to be addressed in the ESL classroom.

First Step: Oral Language Development

In the first step of LEA, the teacher explains the LEA procedure to the students and then elicits a discussion based on a picture or event. Safwat and others (1986) suggest that the teacher go through an example (by drawing a picture or telling a story, then writing down the description or story) so that students can see how oral language can be represented in print.

A variety of techniques for eliciting language experience stories from students can be used, and many different sources can provide themes for reading and writing. The important thing is that the themes which are developed should reflect student background and interest and tie student experience to the process of language learning. The most common story starters are picture cues such as photographs, postcards, or drawings and other illustrations from books and magazines (Safwat and her colleagues suggest having students draw their own picture). In fact, the use of visual materials in LEA is considered essential by some practitioners (Lewis, 1990).

Stories can also be started from word cues or subject cues. Ringel and Smith (1989) list topics of general appeal such as special clothes, food, wedding customs, leaders, holidays, and animals which might work as story starters with any group. Teachers may also have students talk about a common experience such as immigration or a significant event such as an earthquake. For more advanced students or native language literacy classes, newspaper articles and short stories can be read in class to generate themes for discussion and writing (Rabideau, 1988). Rabideau also suggests the use of videotaped interviews or dramatizations related to the student's interests or life experience. The important thing is that the image, experience, or activities come from the students' own experience and knowledge and that students use words that are their own (Safwat et al., 1986).

Second step: Student Dictation

In the second step of LEA, the teacher writes the text on the blackboard in the same words spoken by the students (Rabideau, 1988). Teachers can work individually with students to create texts or with the entire class to help develop stories or projects. In working with the total class, the teacher acts as a guide to elicit a discussion to reach consensus on what should be written down. The written text may take many forms: oral history, narrative, poem, song, letter to an editor or policymaker, or directions on how to do or make something, (Kazemek, 1989, p. 5).

Whether or not to correct the errors students make in their story-telling is an important issue at this stage. Views vary on whether the teacher should write exactly what the student says, mistakes and all, or whether only accurate forms are to be written down (Lewis, 1990). Lewis argues that the role of the teacher is to provide the correct English forms for what the students are trying to express; she places the emphasis on correction. Ringel and Smith suggest a middle ground in which instructors focus only on certain errors and correct those. They argue that "being too faithful to an ESL student's exact words in an LEA reading can sometimes hamper that student's progress" (Ringel & Smith, 1989, p. 8). They suggest that the degree to which the original LEA/ESL story is followed should be left up to the individual teacher. Others argue that teachers should write down what the students say, not what they want the students to say; in this view, the focus is on meaning, not form (Rabideau, 1988; Savage, 1984 citing the work of Pat Rigg). Most educators agree that the goal of LEA (whether taught in native language or English) is not so much to correct grammatical errors as to help students develop an idea of the correspondence between the spoken word and the written word. To illustrate, Rabideau gives as an example the case of 50 year old woman in a Spanish literacy class who all her life has said

"haiga" (instead of haya). He states that in such cases it is imperative to write the word exactly as she said it, otherwise she will be confused by the discrepancy (Rabideau, 1988). In support of this view, Safwat and her colleagues reason that, "Most teachers are not afraid that students will permanently acquire incorrect forms when allowing natural oral communication in the class. Similarly, we should not assume that students will fossilize incorrect forms when writing naturally" (Safwat et al., 1986, p. 4).

Third Step: Reading

In the third step of LEA, the written text that results from the LEA activity becomes the material for a reading lesson, which then becomes the basis for follow-up activities. First, the instructor serves as a model by reading the text, then students read together with the teacher, then alone (see Lewis, 1990, p. 27).

Many activities can be used to develop reading skills based on the dictated stories (or letters), which are usually typed and reread at subsequent classes. Savage (1984) suggests a variety of ways to use word cards for structure and word practice such as matching word (or flash) cards to duplicate a word in context or arranging word cards into a sentence. The stories can also be cut into separate paragraphs and pasted on cards which students then arrange in order (Rigg & Taylor, 1979). Other follow-up activities include having students copy the text from the board, having students find all the words starting with "s" (or any other letter), or having them find all the times "the" or "man" appear in the story (Bright et al., 1982).

Editing is an activity that may follow after the first reading. This is the stage in which corrections are made: misspellings may be changed, punctuation introduced, grammar points straightened out, or phrasing made to sound more fluent. Who makes the correction is a point of contention. While some instructors feel that it is the teacher's role to correct sentences and thus provide students with a model for proper English, others suggest that teachers ask students which parts of their story they may want to alter and then provide them with ideas for making these changes (e.g., by saying things like "which words are you not sure about? Let's look them up." or "Is there anything that doesn't sound quite right to you? Let's see how else you might say that.")

Rereading and Retelling

An important aspect of LEA is the rereading and retelling of both LEA texts and related texts. Rereading may take place orally or silently, individually or with a partner or group, in the classroom or at home (Rigg & Taylor, 1979; Lewis, 1979). Rereading increases a student's speed, enabling a beginning reader to practice fluent, efficient reading. In addition, when rereading the LEA text together with a related, published text, the student learns to link personal experience to the larger world. Kazemek shows how an LEA text dealing with experiences during the Vietnam (or Korean or Second World) War can be connected with a book or an

article about the war, or a group poem about faded friendships can be compared to one or more other poems about the loss of friends (Kazemek, 1989).

Assessment

According to Kazemek, the process of retelling stories not only contributes to social interaction, it also "allows the instructor, and student, to assess how well the student is constructing meaning from a particular text." One advantage to teaching with LEA is that it enables the instructor to "gather informal information about how individuals are developing as readers and writers" (Kazemek, 1989, p. 5). Safwat and colleagues (1986) describe further ways LEA can be used to assess students' progress:

Individualized LEA is an excellent formative testing technique for evaluating how much language students have acquired during the aural/oral parts of a lesson. ..[I]ncorrect structures due to incomplete learning of a grammatical point or to over-generalizations of previously learned structures, can easily be recognized. Teachers can later focus on forms and vocabulary that have not been learned. As greater language proficiency is reached, the form of the dictated stories will evolve. An individual's progress can be recorded simply by keeping copies of the stories. (p. 4)

Summary

The Language Experience Approach can complement any literacy curriculum that focuses on meaning. It can also become the very heart of a student-centered approach (Ringel & Smith, 1989). It fits in well with a Freirean model with an emphasis on empowerment since it allows students to link their own ideas with the larger socio-cultural issues of the society and the world and in the process builds group solidarity (Kazemek, 1989). In some programs, it may be the center of a personal relevance orientation, in which students develop self-esteem through reading and writing. LEA is also conducive to a thematic approach to teaching. Safwat and colleagues (1986), for example, have used LEA with beginning ESL literacy students when teaching units on health, shopping, nationality, occupations, and housing.

While some teachers make LEA the center of their literacy lessons, others caution against trying to build an entire class around LEA. They point out that, like any teaching strategy, it is most effective when mixed with other activities (Ringel & Smith, 1989). Even though a variety of teaching methods are used within the LEA approach, particularly in follow-up activities, the main focus is always on meaning and global ideas, not on discrete tasks. The greatest strength of LEA may lie in the fact that it moves students from oral language to literacy by validating the experience, knowledge, and interests that all learners, literate or not, bring to class.

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7. PROMISING PRACTICES: TEACHING ESL LITERACY IN THE MULTILEVEL CLASSROOM

Multilevel classrooms are a reality in adult education. Most classes are comprised of students from a variety of countries, educational experiences, and socio-economic backgrounds. Even classes that start with a homogeneous group may split into levels after a few sessions: some students may attend regularly while others do not, or some may make faster progress than the rest of the class. Other classes are heterogeneous from the beginning, either because the resources to offer different levels are not available or because students are not able to attend the classes designed for their individual levels due to family obligations or work constraints (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1983). Thus teaching a disparate group of students continues to be a challenge for all adult education teachers, but especially for those who teach literacy to ESL adults.

In recent years, the differences among ESL students have become more pronounced since many students who had previously not enrolled are now mandated to attend ESL classes as a condition of receiving continued government support or qualifying for amnesty. Many of the new learners have had fewer years of education in their home countries than "traditional" ESL students and have not had much opportunity to develop their literacy skills. As a result, many ESL teachers are now trying to teach classes in which some students are literate while others are not, even though their oral language ability may be similar. Along with differential levels of education and literacy, ESL students now also differ greatly in other respects: the way print is used in their communities, how much exposure they have had to print materials in general and to the Roman alphabet in particular, the reasons they have for wanting to learn to read and write, the kind of background knowledge they bring to topics discussed in books and stories, and how familiar they are with "school-based" literacy.

ESL literacy teachers thus face a special challenge: how to provide learning opportunities that support those who are still having difficulty "cracking the code" while providing enough challenges to those who are well on their way to becoming independent readers and writers. The literature suggests a number of techniques for teaching in a multilevel literacy classroom including whole class and small group activities, pair work, and individual work. Several general methods or approaches also seem particularly appropriate for this type of class: cooperative learning, layered instruction, and language experience.

Bell's Views on the Multilevel Classroom: Getting Started, Curriculum Development, and Needs Assessment

Bell has written recently on the multilevel classroom (Bell, 1988). She points out that teachers in multilevel classes face the challenge of adapting curriculum to fit the needs of the individual students while maintaining a cohesive classroom. Therefore, when planning lessons, the teacher needs to consider a number of factors that can influence the learning strategies of the students. One such factor is whether the student is literate in her or his own language. This is relevant because a student with literacy skills has certain strategies which make learning a new language easier and less of a struggle. Bell stresses that

If the students' educational background includes literacy skills, even if in a completely different script, they have developed a whole set of skills, such as the ability to predict or to draw information from physical context, that will transfer to the new language. (p. 3)

Bell points out that culture is another factor that plays a role in student expectations of the learning process. Some cultures expect students to act in a passive manner and not to question teachers. Other cultures encourage students to ask questions, viewing questions and student verbal input as signs of interest in the subject matter. Differences in student background with regard to politics, national pride, and gender roles can also lead to different student expectations.

In addition to these educational and cultural factors, Bell mentions that individual factors also play a part in a successful learning experience. Language ability, motivation, age, length of time in this country, and the amount of time the student can devote to study all affect her or his progress in learning a second language. By being aware of these issues, teachers can create an environment that nurtures education and provides curriculum to meet individual student needs.

When designing curriculum for the multilevel class, Bell challenges teachers to provide useful activities for all class members simultaneously and to make these activities a productive use of students' time. In her discussion of curriculum planning, Bell cites examples of innovative ways of teaching that incorporate activities for students with various levels of competence and skill development. One example is social chat, which she describes as the dialogue between teacher and student before class or an introduction to the class session itself. For the beginning student, this social chat may consist mainly of listening, but the intermediate and advanced students will both listen and speak. For the class session, Bell's model teacher chooses a theme for a day's class and incorporates it into activities appropriate for every level of literacy. The activities focus primarily on language for each level, with the intermediate and advanced levels built on the beginning level. Using these activities in a variety of group or individual work sessions allows for maximum benefit in the multilevel classroom (Bell, 1988).

Bell's view is that, in order for the curriculum to benefit students in multilevel classrooms, the program must perform a needs assessment before beginning instruction. Assessing what students already know, what they need to learn, and what their learning priorities are constitute several areas to be assessed. Gathering this information from students in multilevel classrooms, especially from beginning students, can be difficult. One alternative suggested by Bell is for the teacher to gather this information as one activity of the first few lessons. Once this information is gathered and needs are assessed, the selection of goals should be a decision made jointly by the teacher and the students.

Similarly, the evaluation of student progress should include both teacher and student assessment. Bell finds that an ongoing evaluation of the teacher, along with materials and strategies used to present the lessons, is critical to the effective multilevel classroom. Journals and checklists

provide ways in which teachers can evaluate their own activities. Students can participate by evaluating the activities at the end of each class.

When modifications to the program are obviously needed, Bell suggests that the problems must be clearly defined before they can be successfully resolved. For example, teachers might ask: Are the activities not relevant to the students or do they just need to be presented more clearly? Is the pace too quick or do the students need time to adjust to the new method being used? Are the teacher's expectations too high, considering that the students have other adult responsibilities? Teachers will always find that some activities that work well for one group do not work for another, and achieving a balance within a given classroom is difficult. However, the teacher is not alone in trying to find balance, for, when the students play an active part in their own education process, they can direct their learning and have input on content, pace, and relevance of various activities.

Bell shows how opportunities for reading and writing can be provided in a variety of ways, through whole group activities, equal-ability groups, cross-ability groups, and individual work. When the class remains as a whole group, each student contributes at her or his level, and this helps to build class unity. The equal-ability group is designed to teach tasks at particular ability levels. The cross-ability group has benefits for all concerned when students of different abilities work together. For example, the beginning student gets individual attention and input from a more advanced student. The advanced student not only teaches but also develops "greater awareness of how the language operates and helps them to identify areas of their own expertise that need attention" (p. 28). Individual work allows students to choose their activities and work at their own pace.

From Whole Group to Small Group through Layered Instruction: The Texas Approach

The layered instruction approach is appropriate for classes composed of students with a common primary language (Texas Education Agency, 1990b). The first step in layered instruction is to determine the skill levels of the students and then group them with peers of similar levels for instruction. The assessment to determine skill levels is composed of an interview with the student in her or his native language and a written statement on their background. Placement levels may change as the teacher finds out more about the student's abilities. The following groupings cover the range of adult ESL students for whom Texas developed the multi-layered model:

1. advanced - students with academic skills up to the 12th grade in their own language
2. intermediate - LEP students with skills at grades 5-8 in their native language
3. basic - LEP students with skills at grades 0-4 in their native language

4. graduate - monolingual, lack English proficiency, may be professionals
5. pre-literate - monolingual or LEP, lack literacy skills in primary language, may not have prior school experience
6. pre-literate, non-Roman - function at pre-literate level but have no experience with Roman alphabet

Successful implementation of layered instruction depends on a few major points. They are as follows:

1. arrange students into skill groups with instruction beginning at the most advanced level
2. each group should be prepared during teaching presentation to work independently
3. teacher adjusts activity to teach all levels, not to teach each level with different activities
4. student expectation of entire process is important for success
5. layered instruction lends itself to teaching a core curriculum

In multi-layered instruction, the teacher presents the lesson five times, with the first presentation aimed at the advanced group although the entire class listens. Only the advanced students are expected to respond and participate in the first presentation. The advanced group starts their independent work as the next group receives their instruction. This process is repeated until all groups have received instruction and activities. The process involves a layered approach in the following sense: As each group is taught and the layer peeled away, a smaller group of students receive instruction, with those needing most exposure receiving repeated instruction. According to the Texas Education Agency:

When properly implemented, layered instruction can reserve an equitable portion of the teacher's time and attention for students of low proficiency and skills, while enhancing the teacher's ability to manage instruction effectively for students in all skill levels. (p. 7)

Using Small Groups

Another approach to dealing with various levels of student readiness for English literacy instruction is peer grouping. In the layered instruction model which utilizes a form of peer grouping, the teacher takes responsibility for presentation and selection of materials and activities. Other methods of grouping provide for greater student involvement and

individualization in the way literacy tasks are selected and learned. One such method is peer coaching: students are encouraged to share their skills and talents as well as take an active part in classroom organization. In a successful implementation of peer coaching, the students effectively teach one another. Peer teaching allows students who have mastered an assignment to teach the relevant concepts to another student who has not yet mastered it. However, it is important that the same students not consistently "play teacher"; roles need to be reversed. As part of such a role reversal, "especially slow learners can be given the job of introducing a new student to the class and familiarizing that student with the classroom routine" (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1983, p. 106).

Advantages of Small Group Instruction

Groupings also have the social value of reducing isolation, increasing cooperation, and helping the students feel part of the whole class. The teacher might begin the class with whole group instruction and then move to pairs or small group activities, or vice versa. Students may work in fixed groups or rotate through groups of different skill levels. Students with similar interests can be grouped and activities built around their interests. Random groups help students of different abilities to meet and interact on a class project without the label of tutor and tutee. Learning centers with a variety of activities help to foster individualized instruction. Planning these activities to meet student interests and needs and allowing students to design their own learning opportunities will help keep motivation high.

Project Work and Shared Tasks

Shared task activities hold great promise in helping teachers meet the challenge of using appropriate materials for different levels while implementing sound literacy instruction for the class overall. Students can be given tasks such as planning a field trip, inviting a guest speaker, writing a letter to a famous person or the city council, developing a poster for "jobs in our community" or an organizational chart for the workplace, making a list of community services or bilingual "hotlines", developing a "talent chart" that shows the special skills that class members have (e.g., auto repair, crocheting, singing), discussing a "students' bill of rights" in the amnesty classroom, or writing a timeline that shows when different people in the class came to the United States (Bell, 1988; Wrigley, 1989b). In these activities, lower level students, perhaps working in pairs, can be given more global activities such as finding a pertinent section in a phone book, guide, or newspaper; they can be actively involved in contributing ideas (perhaps in their own language) and in orally "composing" pieces of text to be integrated into the larger project.

Theme-based approaches in which different students respond on different levels also help students work together and find their own level of expertise. Some researchers suggest a unit on "Medicine: Folk vs. Modern" in which each student is given a specific assignment (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1983, p. 108). During this project, higher level students might read

and report back on an article, while other students may be asked to bring a traditional medicine from home and explain the ingredients and the use of the remedy. Bell (1988) suggests a variation on the health theme, in which students learn to read different labels on medicine bottles. While more advanced students learn to read directions, lower level students can match poison symbols with words or work with a clock face to show what time the medicine needs to be taken. Another option would be an environmental print activity in which lower level students sort all the packages that say "Tylenol" from those that say "Aspirin."

Cooperative Learning: Jigsaw

Many of the shared task activities outlined above lend themselves to a cooperative learning approach in which both the work of the group and the task of each student are clearly defined, and students are assessed and recognized according to both individual efforts and group efforts. One variation is "jigsaw" in which each student has different pieces of information that need to be combined before the task can be completed. In cooperative learning, the sequence of group activities may vary: Students can start work individually, in pairs, or as part of the whole group, as long as they both work separately and come together again at various points of the session. For example, a group of students might decide (or be encouraged) to set up a planning committee for a class party. While some students develop a list of items to be purchased, others put together a picture page of the same items, and a third group might research prices from newspaper ads and store flyers. Another group might be in charge of working out a budget for the party. In order to carry out their planning tasks effectively, the various groups will need to check with each other on what should be purchased and how much each would cost. Similar committees can be set up for planning the food to be served, writing up a class menu, or developing a plan for decorating the classroom. Writing and publishing an account of their efforts for the school paper can follow a similar pattern.

As Bell points out, working in a group, whether it is cross-ability or homogeneous, can give all students a chance to work with literacy in ways that are relevant and challenging. For the teacher, developing projects, defining tasks, working out clear directions, and assessing progress is often difficult at first, but many teachers find it worth their time and effort in the long run (Bell, 1988, p. 8). Programs can facilitate the teacher's job by setting up a materials resource bank and a picture file, providing opportunities for teacher sharing, facilitating the use of cameras and video equipment, and making funds available for incidentals such as phone calls, materials, films, and postage.

Many times such group work provides an alternative to students who have been unsuccessful in the traditional learning environment. Shared activities actively involve students in language, literacy, and problem solving (Perin, 1988). Besides providing an opportunity for students of different levels to work together, cooperative learning tasks support meaningful reading and writing activities by requiring that students bring their knowledge of the world and their coping skills to each activity. Since students are required to share information, group activities of this kind also strengthen the speaking and listening skills of the students.

Literacy Centers

Another way to have students develop the differential reading and writing skills that they already have is to set up literacy centers where students can work on individual tasks geared towards their literacy level. These centers could be reading corners where students can look through (real) books, magazines, newspapers, catalogues, advertisements, television guides, food coupons, or interesting pictures that could inspire a story or a poem. In addition, expressive posters, community art, or captioned photographs of the class, the school, and the surrounding community might decorate the walls. Reading centers can also contain picture files, articles, student texts, and activities arranged by themes, so that students who want to read or write about a particular topic can find information that piques their interest and matches their level of proficiency. Whenever possible, bilingual materials and dictionaries should be included.

Since one of the impediments that beginning readers face is the fact that they do not have sustained interactions with print, each class could institute a ten minute period of silent reading during which students go to the literacy center and choose a piece of material that they will take to their desk and read or look over.

The Center for Applied Linguistics explains how literacy centers can be used as learning labs in which students can work individually to improve their basic reading and writing skills. They suggest the following:

Reading

- * Vocabulary items written on large cards with a picture denoting the meaning on the back. Students must read the word, and then can check the meaning by looking at the picture on the back.
- * Sheets of matching exercises consisting of traffic and street signs and their corresponding meanings.
- * For survival reading comprehension practice, a selection of actual or adapted classified ads, numbered by difficulty, with multiple-choice questions for each ad.
- * A selection of short stories, numbered by difficulty, with a set of comprehension questions for each story.

Writing

- * For vocabulary and sentence-writing practice, single words written on index cards divided into meaning-related sets of five. Students must write a sentence with each word.

- * For preliteracy skills practice, a set of alphabet cards. Non-literate students must practice copying the letters.
- * For functional communication practice, a set of one-sided dialogues. Students can write the other part.
- * A folder of picture sequences (e.g., cartoons). Students choose one sequence and write a description of what is happening. (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1983, pp. 109-110)

Conclusion

These teaching strategies, instructional approaches, and methodologies are different yet provide some overlap. They all require initial assessment, a clearly defined task, and some form of grouping and evaluation of work. Setting up centers, designing projects, organizing the class into groups, and developing opportunities for pair work may initially take a great deal of effort and patience. Encouraging students to contribute ideas for shared tasks and making it possible for them to develop "ownership" of their project may be one way to face the challenge and share the burden of the multilevel classroom.

NOTE: Later versions of this paper will show how teachers in large classes use individualized teaching and structured pair activities to support the literacy development of non-readers and beginning readers.

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8. CLASSROOM TEXTS AND TEACHER RESOURCES

Recognizing that the idea of "textbooks for non-literate students" is a contradiction in terms, a number of ESL literacy programs are now choosing to develop their own materials through collaboration among teachers and between teachers and students. Instead of teaching to the book, these programs focus on developing literacy activities that encourage students to focus on meaningful print while they develop word identification skills. (For examples of such activities, see the earlier section on approaches.)

Rather than relying on commercially available materials, many teachers now use environmental print and realia that are part of students' everyday lives. These may include money, money orders, paychecks, product labels, store advertisements, catalogues, lottery tickets, captioned photographs, restaurant menus, charts and graphs, flyers, posters on buses and trains, calendars, clocks, tags on clothing, for sale and for rent signs, grocery store receipts, birthday cards, tax forms, official notices from government agencies, drivers' licenses, social security cards, etc. More and more frequently, teachers are taking students outside of the classroom and into the community to have them respond to the print they see on doors, fences, construction sites, streets, newspaper racks, coffee or soda machines, telephones, gas station pumps, check cashing stations, grocery store directories, or produce stands.

Instead of using worksheets for writing activities, many innovative teachers provide their students with all kinds of open grids and charts, blank flashcards, writing paper, stationery and greeting cards, name tags, butcher block paper, and sets of colored pens and pencils so that students can write down their ideas and stories or practice words and letters. Teachers who integrate a language experience approach into their teaching often use the blackboard to write down student-generated stories or encourage students to tell their story into a tape recorder. The teacher then transcribes it later on a typewriter or computer. As good teachers have always done, literacy teachers now brainstorm together to share ideas or consult curriculum guides, handbooks, and articles to help them develop new activities or extend familiar ones. Some also use conference presentations on ESL literacy or newsletter articles as sources of information.

Many programs consider it important to include textbooks in their programs. They may do so for a variety of reasons: teachers may not have the knowledge, experience, or time needed to develop materials from scratch; many students like to have a "real book" to work with; buying alternative materials and developing activity sheets can be time-consuming and costly; the program uses a standardized test that is linked to a textbook series; their literacy students need to develop a standard set of skills required in the next level; or the program has always used books.

In response to requests for books from programs, teachers, and students, there are now a number of literacy texts available, some specifically designed for ESL students, others originally conceived for native speakers of English. Publishers are also starting to market literacy videos and computer programs for use in ESL or Spanish literacy classrooms. We present below a list of resources that are currently available and have come to our attention; however, we are not endorsing any particular guide, textbook, or video. An annotated

bibliography listing the kinds of resources that teachers in the field have found useful will appear at a later time.

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the members of our Working Group for their valuable input for the section immediately following on how to choose appropriate materials for ESL literacy students. In addition, we have used a "Materials Bias Checklist" compiled by Reynaldo Macias for the questions below related to bias. And, finally, our bibliography below on authentic materials benefitted from a book review section on non-traditional materials for adult ESL, edited by Elsa Auerbach, in the June 1989 issue of TESOL Quarterly.

CHOOSING APPROPRIATE LITERACY MATERIALS:

Before committing themselves to materials to be used in the ESL literacy classroom, program administrators, teachers, and students might consider the following questions:

I. NEED:

1. Why do we need "textbooks" ?
2. Are our students better served with texts or should we develop a resource bank of materials that teachers can share?
3. What is the best way to spend our limited dollars? Does it make more sense to invest in computers, books, and VCRs, or in teacher time and expertise? Would we be better off spending funds on program-based curriculum development?

II. LINKING ESL LITERACY TO PROGRAM FOCUS

1. Do the materials support the perception that the program, the teacher, and the students have of the reading and writing process?
2. Are content, language, and exercises in the materials reflective of the program philosophy? If not, how would the material fit into the orientation the program has chosen?
3. Do the materials teach towards both accuracy and fluency in reading and writing? Does the balance between these skills support the program's view of the way literacy should be taught?

4. Is the primary focus of the materials on the literacy area the program wants to emphasize (e.g., workplace, ESL civics, pre-employment, pre-academic, life skills, family literacy, self-actualization)?

III. LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

1. Will students feel both successful and challenged doing the lessons?
2. Do the materials try to link listening and speaking to reading and writing?
3. Do the materials focus on meaningful reading and writing for a purpose (other than practice)? Are there enough opportunities for students to "try out" writing and express their ideas on paper?
4. Do the activities present a good balance between word recognition skills and letter identification on the one hand and whole language activities on the other? Do the activities provide enough opportunities for global processing, i.e., getting the "big picture" ?
5. Do the materials take advantage of the print environment that exists in the students' communities?
6. Are the materials written at the appropriate level in regard to students' overall language proficiency, their literacy background, their familiarity with cultural concepts, and their prior knowledge?
7. Do the materials encourage students to make hypotheses in reading (e.g., asking students to guess at the meaning of a word using context cues) and to take risks in their writing (e.g., by going through a process of brainstorming with others, writing down ideas, composing several try-out drafts, and focusing on selected aspects of spelling, punctuation, and grammar in the final editing phase)?

IV. LINKING THE TEXT TO STUDENT NEEDS, GOALS AND EXPERIENCES

Do the materials:

1. contain the kind of activities that respond to student needs and student goals? (e.g., To what extent do the materials provide "space" for student contributions such as exchange of ideas and personal and group problem solving?)
2. reflect the students' reality, their roles, lives and aspirations?

3. help students to link their own experience to the activities and tasks?
4. provide a link to the community (e.g., realistically reflect issues that the community faces)?

V. EXTENDING THE STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Do the materials:

1. help activate the background knowledge that students bring to class and call on the coping strategies that they have developed?
2. help student acquire new ideas by linking their experiences and ideas to larger issues in the community or the society?
3. contain opportunities to develop critical thinking and problem solving?

VI. CULTURAL BIAS

1. Do the materials present positive images of immigrant groups in general and of the student group in particular? Do they avoid stereotyping according to age, gender and ethnic group?
2. Do the materials stereotype by omission? Are women, the elderly, Asians, Latinos, blacks, and other groups absent or do they appear only as tokens?
3. Is there an ethnocentric slant to the way cultural information is presented? Do the materials give the impression (or even insist) that there is one right way of doing things or do they explain options and choices?
4. Are the contributions of immigrants and minorities in general and the learners' groups in particular adequately represented in the readings?

VII. LINKING TEACHER EXPERIENCE AND INTEREST WITH THE MATERIALS

1. Given the background of the teachers, does the book look "teachable"? If not, can the program provide the support needed to make it so?
2. Does the book look like it would be a joy to teach and fun to learn from? What activities can be used to "lighten up" literacy overload?

3. Does the content reflect the interests of both teachers and students?
4. Is it clear how teachers are meant to use these materials? How does the teaching approach the book supports fit into the focus of the program's staff development efforts?

VIII. PRINT ACCESSIBILITY

1. Is the print easily accessible (e.g., is it large enough, and is there enough white space)?
2. Is print supported by context (e.g., pictures, photographs, charts, headings)?
3. Is there enough room for students to practice, scribble, and edit their writing?

IX. ADAPTABILITY

1. Can the materials be adapted to various learning and teaching styles?
2. Are there enough different kinds of activities so all students can develop a range of skills?
3. Do the activities lend themselves to whole group discussions, small group work, pair activities, and individual reading and writing?

X. TECHNOLOGY

1. Do the computer programs allow for creativity and meaningful engagement with print or are they merely "electronic worksheets"?
2. Do the videos take full advantage of video capability (using environmental print supported by non-verbal communication) or are they merely expensive "picture books"?

XI. ASSESSMENT

1. Do the materials support the assessment process that the program is using?
2. Can the activities be used as a basis for observing how students interact with print? Do they lend themselves to observing and evaluating literacy progress?

Below is a preliminary bibliography of materials in several categories that have come to our attention. By citing them here, we do not imply any endorsement by the project.

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